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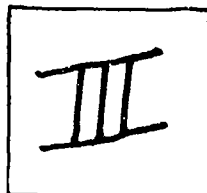
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and the Western Virginia Campaign of 1861

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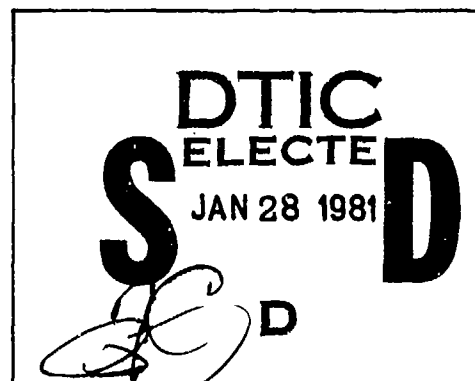
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BRIGADIER GENERAL HENRY A. WISE, C.S.A.
AND THE
WEASTERN VIRGINIA CAMPAIGN OF 1861

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirement for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

PETER G. NUCERA, MAJ, USA
B.A., University of Richmond, 1967

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
1980

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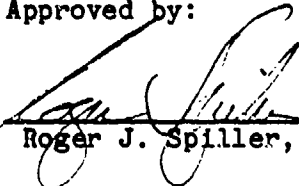
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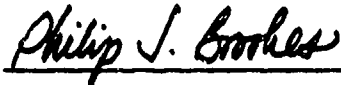
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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

BRIGADIER GENERAL HENRY A. WISE, C.S.A.
AND THE
WESTERN VIRGINIA CAMPAIGN OF 1861

by
Major Peter G. Kucera, USA

This thesis examines Brigadier General Henry A. Wise's involvement in the Western Virginia Campaign of 1861. This Confederate defeat resulted in the Federal occupation of a large, strategically important section of the Confederacy in the first year of the Civil War. The author presents the reasons for this capitulation and, against the backdrop of Wise's political career, evaluates the General's performance as a military commander. This paper discusses the personal conflict which ensued between Henry Wise and John B. Floyd in the Kanawha Valley as a reason for the Confederate failure in western Virginia. The author presents the results of this capitulation to demonstrate how Wise, a popular ex-Governor of Virginia, significantly affected the course of the Civil War. 132 pages.

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ENGRAVED BY A. B. WALTER PHILADA

HON. HENRY A. WISE.
GOVERNOR OF VIRGINIA.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to examine Brigadier General Henry A. Wise's involvement in the Western Virginia Campaign of 1861. It will attempt to illustrate how this Confederate officer, a popular ex-Governor of Virginia, affected the course of the Civil War.

Federal occupation of Virginia's western counties early in the conflict was a significant initial victory for the Union and a psychological 'first blow' to the Southern cause. Although the Confederate administration and the government of Virginia attempted to organize military resistance, the entire region west of the Allegheny Mountains was lost by the winter of 1861. What were the reasons for this capitulation? What role did General Wise play in the military resistance?

Possibly the greatest obstacle to the Southern movement at the beginning of the Civil War was that western Virginia did not support the secession movement. A united Virginia would have presented the Federal government with many difficult problems. By 1861, Virginia was clearly divided into two sections; the slave-holding, plantation-oriented East and the trans-Allegheny West with its few plantations, many small farms and landowners, and few slaves. The West held little economic similarity to the East. Because of its geography, population, economic ties, and communication

links, western Virginia's financial interests lay more with the North and West than with eastern Virginia.

The people, however, still considered themselves Virginians--western Virginians perhaps, but unmistakably Virginians. Although their political ties with Richmond were tenuous, there existed no desire to become a part of Ohio or Pennsylvania. The day after the Ordinance of Secession was passed in Richmond, delegates representing the feelings of these Virginians from west of the mountains, met to discuss the formation of a Restored Government of Virginia.¹ These people did not seek assistance from outside, but initiated an internal movement that eventually led to statehood.

As early as November 1860, the people of western Virginia were concerned about what seemed to be the impending secession of Virginia. Secessionist sentiment was divided among, and even within, the western counties. In the Great Kanawha basin, sentiment in favor of secession existed to a much greater extent than in the northwestern counties.² As the two regions became more polarized after Lincoln's election, preparations were made for hostilities.

¹Boyd B. Stutler, West Virginia in the Civil War (Charleston, West Virginia: Education Foundation, Inc., 1966), 9.

²George E. Moore, "West Virginia and the Civil War" (University of Chicago, PhD, 1921), 303.

Before Virginia actually seceded from the Union in April 1861, men were being recruited for the Southern army and her leaders were making plans for offense as well as defense. The Confederate administration was well aware of the importance of western Virginia's mineral resources, manpower, and strategic significance to the South, but it failed to assess correctly the relative importance of this same region to the Union. The Ohio River and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad represented the lifeline from east to west for the Federal government and made western Virginia a key area to the Union at the beginning of the war. Virginia and the Confederacy acted too late to deny the Union a foothold.

On April 17, 1861, the day the Ordinance of Secession was passed, General Robert E. Lee resigned his commission in the United States Army and was placed in charge of the Virginia militia. He directed his efforts toward the organization of the northwestern counties to stem the protest against secession and to recruit soldiers for the Southern cause. However, ten companies of the home guard had already met at Wheeling and formed a Union regiment.³ General McClellan was already organizing Union forces in Ohio for a movement into western Virginia.

Many of the southwestern counties possessed organized militia in various states of preparedness, but required

³Stutler, West Virginia, 4.

a centralized command. Henry A. Wise, who had just completed his term as former governor of Virginia, was commissioned a Brigadier General in the Army of the Confederate States by President Davis and given the mission to organize the people of the Kanawha Valley and the adjoining counties. Wise had a large political following in this area and his support of internal improvements as Governor had won him the gratitude of western Virginia.

At the same time, Brigadier General John B. Floyd was given the defensive task of protecting the Tennessee and Virginia Railroad line in the southwest. He was assigned the Abingdon and Wytheville area to the south of Wise for the recruiting of a brigade. A Democrat and old political colleague of Henry Wise, Floyd had been governor of Virginia from 1849 to 1852. Wise had split with Floyd in the bitter interparty strife of the decade, and their hatred of each other was far from dead. This animosity between the two generals hampered Confederate military operations in the Kanawha Valley.

Both generals were advised by the Confederate War Department that "a junction of your forces may become desirable . . . to attain the common objective of both" and that Floyd, "being senior by commission, will . . . command the whole."⁴ Although Floyd was senior by date of military

⁴United States, War Department, War of the Rebellion: The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, D.C., 1880-1901), Series I, Vol. II, 908-909. Hereafter referred to as O.R.

rank, both men had received political appointments and Wise wielded the greater political power at the time.⁵ On July 10, 1861, General Floyd received instructions from General R. E. Lee, commander of military operations in Virginia, to proceed north with his 2,000 men to the Kanawha Valley and prepare to meet a possible Federal advance.⁶ Wise refused to cooperate with Floyd and by November 1861, Union forces occupied all of western Virginia to the Allegheny Mountains. A concerted effort to rally the people of the Kanawha Valley to timely and aggressive military action might have denied those southwestern counties to Federal forces. However, the personal conflict between Wise and Floyd precluded a unity of Confederate forces. The failure of the Confederate Army of the Kanawha was primarily due to the ineptitude of Wise as a military commander and to his inability to cooperate with John B. Floyd to achieve unity of command.

The Confederacy lost western Virginia and suffered a significant defeat in the first few months of the war. The Union secured its lifeline to the West through the Ohio River and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, shortening the

⁵Wise was a recent leader of the Democratic Party and had been viewed by that party as a possible candidate for the Presidency. See Henry T. Shanks, The Secession Movement in Virginia, 1847-1861 (Richmond: Garrett and Massie Publishers, 1934), 46-65.

⁶Letter, John B. Floyd to Colonel Northrop, Commissary General, C.S.A., June 11, 1861, Duke University, Archives, Floyd MSS, and O.R., Series I, Vol. LI, Part II, 211.

war and sparing much bloodshed. A new state was formed and admitted to the Union. These were the results of the Western Virginia Campaign of 1861.

Henry A. Wise was a very colorful and fascinating figure in the history of the Civil War, as well as in the political history which preceeded it. The first chapter of this thesis will provide the reader some insight to the mind and the personality of this politician-general.

CHAPTER I

Wise and Antebellum Politics in Virginia

Henry Alexander Wise was born in 1806 at Drummondtown (now Accomac Court House) on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. He was a direct descendent of John Wise, one of the first English settlers on the Shore, and of Colonel Edmund Scarborough, first landholder and Justice on the peninsula (ca. 1632).¹

Orphaned by the death of his father in 1812 and mother in 1813, Henry Wise grew up under the care of his father's two sisters at Clifton, a family plantation near the mouth of the Chesconnessex Creek on the Chesapeake Bay. According to his grandson and biographer, these two distinguished ladies instilled in his youthful mind lessons of virtue and religion, the conduct of a gentleman, and "the fear of God, the fear of nothing else . . . and self-respect."² Wise gained an early appreciation for

¹Jennings Cropper Wise, Colonel John Wise; His Ancestors and Descendents (Richmond, Virginia: The Bell Book and Stationery Company, Inc., 1918), 18.

²Barton Haxall Wise, The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1899), 12.

the important relationship between slave-owning and plantation management from the agrarian economy of the Eastern Shore.

In 1822, still a youth of sixteen years, Henry Wise began his formal education at Washington College, later Washington and Jefferson, in Pennsylvania. Here he exhibited great talent for extemporaneous speaking and skill in debate. Joining the Union Literary Society, Wise was chosen to be the orator of his society in debate on three separate occasions. He won twice and contemptuously debated the judges on their decision the third time.³ This early example of Wise's self-will, impulsive nature, and lack of subordination illustrates the problem which later was to hamper his ability as a leader and officer in the military.

Graduating with honors at Washington College, he attended the law school of Judge Henry St. George Tucker at Winchester, Virginia. Wise returned to the Eastern Shore in 1828 to begin the practice of law, but soon left to marry his college sweetheart, Ann Jennings. The father of the bride, Reverend Obediah Jennings, was a close friend of General Andrew Jackson and the couple spent their honeymoon at the General's estate, the Hermitage, near Nashville, Tennessee. As a student, Wise had admired

³Wise, Life of Wise, 26.

Jackson deeply and cast his first vote for him in the Presidential election of 1828.⁴

Returning to Accomac, Virginia in 1830, Wise settled down to farming and the practice of law. He soon gathered a following with his powerful political oratory, and at the age of twenty-six was elected to the Congress of the United States as a Jackson Democrat. Between 1833 and 1843, Wise enjoyed an eventful and somewhat stormy career in Congress, gaining a reputation as a fiery orator and staunch champion of the South.⁵ He acquired recognition in defense of Southern rights in his struggle over the 'abolition petitions' with John Quincy Adams. In Adams, Wise found a match for his eloquent rhetoric and "often took extreme positions out of defiance."⁶ Wise was so unyielding in his opinions and principles while speaking that he sometimes went beyond the hurling of verbal invectives. Twice he was involved in duels in an era that had been to censure such action by gentlemen and representatives of the people. The first duel was with Richard Coke, who sought to hold Wise responsible for "certain venomous criticisms of his character and political views", while in the later event he was involved as a second in

⁴Ibid., 28.

⁵Clement Eaton, The Mind of the Old South (Baton Rouge: The Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 91.

⁶Eaton, Mind, 92.

the Graves-Cilley duel.⁷ Coke received a gunshot wound, but was not permanently injured, and Wise escaped unhurt. This 'affair of honor' satisfied the participants and, as was so frequently the case in the Old South, all memories of personal enmity were erased as soon as the shots were fired. Relations between the two were amicable from that time forward.

Wise split with Jackson over the United States Bank issue and joined the Whig party supporting his personal friend and fellow Virginian, John Tyler, for the vice-presidency under William Henry Harrison. Upon Harrison's death, President Tyler nominated Wise as minister to France, but the Senate refused to confirm him because of his continued opposition and denunciation of Henry Clay, the 'Great Pacificator'.⁸ Wise finally achieved confirmation as minister to Brazil in 1843. When he attempted to halt the use of American-owned ships in the slave trade through Brazil from Africa, the Brazilian government requested his recall.⁹ This illustrates a somewhat paradoxical side of Henry Wise. Although he supported states' rights, as an embodiment of the Constitution and the Southern economic system, he also opposed slavery as a political expedient, in this instance, and

⁷Wise, Life of Wise, 83.

⁸Ibid.. 105.

⁹Eaton, Mind, 94.

sought to halt its propagation in the United States. Leaving Brazil of his own volition in 1847, Wise returned to the Eastern Shore of Virginia and his law practice.

Upon his return Wise went over to the Democrats and supported R.M.T. Hunter of Virginia and the "Southern Rights" faction in the contest of 1848-1851 over the Compromise.¹⁰ He was selected to attend the Nashville Convention, called by the slave-state extremists seeking to protect Southern unity in 1850, but did not go. Although Wise was a staunch 'States Rights' Democrat, he expected the compromise measures to pass Congress and believed that until those measures were voted upon the Nashville Convention should not act.¹¹

The Virginia Constitutional Convention met in 1850 to extend suffrage, review the basis of representation in the House of Delegates, and provide for popular election of state officials. Wise was elected as a delegate from Accomack County, and he alone of the eastern men defended the western program in the Convention. Advocacy of the white basis of apportionment won for him the gratitude and support of western Virginia in later endeavors.¹² With a large following in the west, Wise became an important

¹⁰Henry T. Shanks, The Secession Movement in Virginia, 1847-1861 (Richmond: Garrett and Massie Publishers, 1934), 47.

¹¹Shanks, Secession, 34.

¹²Eaton, Mind, 95.

figure in the struggle for control of the Democratic party after the retirement of Thomas Ritchie. Wise was an aggressive leader who frequently changed sides, but regardless of his stand on issues, he carried many followers with him.¹³ Hunter, U.S. Senator from Virginia since 1848, and Wise began their first contest for party leadership in 1852. Wise sought to have Virginia's delegates vote for Buchanan, while Hunter and his supporters desired to nominate a Southerner for President on the Democratic ticket. When Franklin Pierce was nominated, both leaders joined to carry the state for the ticket.¹⁴

In 1854 Wise announced his candidacy for Governor without consulting Hunter. He enhanced his prospects for nomination by courting western Virginia and attacking the American movement, represented by the nativist Know-Nothing party. The Whigs had joined this movement to strengthen their position in the South by directing conservative sentiment against the Democratic party rule. This enabled Wise to consolidate his attack. He effectively labeled the movement as an abolitionist and fanatical undertaking and gained popular support for his candidacy. His nomination by the Democratic party was unanimous except for several of the old Ritchie wing, such as John Letcher and John B. Floyd, who refused to support

¹³Shanks, Secession, 47.

¹⁴Ibid., 48.

him in the campaign.¹⁵ Wise, elected Governor to serve a four-year term (1856-1860), became the titular head of his party, controlling the usual party machinery and appointments. He aggressively supported internal improvements and further increased his popular support, especially in the west.

Although the Hunter faction remained loyal during Wise's campaign, the Wise-Hunter conflict intensified and severely weakened the Democratic party during the late fifties. Both leaders, desiring the Democratic presidential nomination of 1860, began to shift their positions to appeal to the whole state. Wise began to court the slaveholding east as Hunter began to court the west. A revitalized Whig movement posed little threat as it continued to split from within on many of the contemporary issues on slavery. While the ultimate point of interest was the presidential election of 1860, the selection of a gubernatorial candidate for the election of 1859 represented the first challenge for party control. The Wise faction nominated John Brockenbrough, a pro-slavery easterner, while the Hunter faction nominated John Letcher, who had strong support in the west. At the Democratic Convention in Petersburg, Letcher won support from all sections of Virginia except the southwest. The convention demonstrated the new strength of an eastern-northwestern

¹⁵Ibid.

coalition forged by Hunter.¹⁶ Thus the leadership of the Democratic party in Virginia changed hands once again.

Since before the Petersburg Convention, Wise and his friends had taken an extreme position on slavery in the territories in a bid for support of the lower South and the "Southern Rights" faction in Virginia, while the now more conservative Hunter faction urged the party to drop the slavery issue in the territories in an attempt to gain the followers of Stephen A. Douglas in the North. Adherence to a hard line on slavery in the territories was considered by the Hunter wing to be a policy that would bring about the election of a Republican and disunion.¹⁷ This territorial debate greatly strengthened Hunter in Virginia.

One of the most notable events of Wise's governorship was the trial and execution of John Brown and his party. The punitive measures taken were not as significant as Wise's political maneuvering and action as the leader of the state. Something of the man's demagogical nature is revealed in his uncompromising determination to be 'center-stage' of whatever action accompanied the John Brown affair. In his repeated denial of Northern petitions for the release of Brown, Wise greatly increased his

¹⁶Ibid., 57-58.

¹⁷Ibid., 63.

prestige and influence within Virginia and throughout the South.¹⁸

Wise and his organ, the Richmond Enquirer edited by his son O. Jennings Wise, used the Brown raid to turn the support of the "Southern Rights" wing from the now conservative Hunter. Southern whites had always greatly feared a slave insurrection. In Virginia, memories of the Southampton uprising and massacre were still quite vivid. The Enquirer used the "amount of money with which these wretches at Harper's Ferry were supplied" as evidence that "the Northern fanatics mean more than words, and are determined to wage with men and money the 'irrepressible conflict' to its bitter end."¹⁹ A somewhat sympathetic Northern reaction to John Brown's raid and his execution shocked the South and consolidated public sentiment in Virginia for determined action. Wise found this sentiment to support his radical territorial program. He attempted to place the blame for the raid on the whole Republican party.²⁰

When the Virginia Legislature met in December 1859, Wise attacked the North as having finally aligned itself with the abolitionists. In a fiery message to that body he declared, "There can be no compromise with them . . .

¹⁸Ibid., 103.

¹⁹Richmond Enquirer, April 21, 1848.

²⁰Shanks, Secession, 88.

They must be met and crushed, or they will crush us, or our union with non-slaveholding states cannot continue." He recommended that Virginia should "organize and arm," determine the position of each state in the Union in respect to slavery and the Constitution and, when all the states were heard from, he would have the Old Dominion act and "not resolve."²¹

This call for determined action made Wise the most popular leader in Virginia. He had emphasized the significance of the Brown incident to make himself the hero of the Southern cause.²² While a less radical approach by the Governor of Virginia might have preserved the status quo, Wise quite probably provided the spark which fired an already smoldering sectional conflict.

Following the expiration of his term of office at Richmond, Wise relinquished the governor's mansion to John Letcher, and moved to his Rolliston estate near Norfolk. Hunter's leaders felt that Wise was too strongly entrenched for their forces to defeat in the state Democratic Convention, so they postponed it until February 13, 1860. They believed that, given time, Wise's fiery stand would destroy or dissipate his chances for the support of Virginia at the national Democratic convention to be held

²¹Ibid., 92.

²²Richmond Enquirer, August 30, 1859.

April 23, 1860, in Charleston.²³ Their strategy proved correct. The Hunter wing strongly contested Wise in the county 'primaries' and congressional district conventions in late February and early March as the extreme Southern sentiment declined and Wise's popularity dwindled away. Virginia was not yet ready for the action which their ex-governor proposed. After the first defeat in the district conventions, Wise withdrew his name. Thus the contest for the Democratic nomination for President was left, at this point, to Hunter and to Stephen A. Douglas. Many of Wise's followers turned to Douglas to prevent Hunter from controlling the state's delegation to the Charleston Convention.²⁴

In the Charleston Convention the states of the lower South split with Virginia and the border states as the former insisted on specific protection by Congress for slavery in the territories. This stand was contrary to the resolutions of Virginia's state Democratic convention which had endorsed the Cincinnati Platform: the congressional control of slavery in territories. The Douglas faction reminded those friendly to Hunter that the embodiment of the principle in the Southern demands, further entrenchment of slavery, would result in the destruction of the Democratic party and the election of a Republican

²³Ibid.

²⁴Shanks, Secession, 104.

as President.²⁵ The Virginia delegation attempted to reconcile the cotton states and the Northern element by an adoption of the Tennessee Resolutions. Basically, these resolutions reiterated the Constitutional right of all citizens of the United States to settle in the territories with their property, and that this right would not be destroyed or impaired by Congressional or Territorial legislation. When this effort failed, the Virginia delegation recommended that the body adjourn to meet at Baltimore on June 18th in hope that time would bring a conciliation of the party.²⁶

On the eve of the Baltimore Convention the different factions in Virginia were still not united on a course of action should the cotton states' demands be denied by the Northern element. In a desperate caucus in Baltimore, the supporters of Wise and Hunter agreed to withdraw from the Convention if the seceders (Alabama, South Carolina, Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi, Florida and Georgia) were not readmitted. They decided that the question of party preservation was no longer the adoption of the Cincinnati Platform, but one of regaining the cooperation of the lower South. When the Convention refused to seat the old Alabama and Louisiana delegates on the fifth day, the chairman of the Virginia delegation led the Hunter and

²⁵Ibid., 106.

²⁶Ibid., 107.

Wise men out of the hall. Others followed until there were only thirteen states with full delegations left.²⁷

The Democratic party was thoroughly rift into three separate factions. The Constitutional Union Party, composed largely of old Whigs and representatives of the border states, nominated John Bell of Tennessee and Edward Everett of Massachusetts. The Seceders Party, comprised of Virginia and the seventeen states that walked out of the Baltimore Convention, nominated John C. Breckenridge of Kentucky and General Joseph Lane of Oregon. The remainder of the original Democratic party nominated Stephen A. Douglas.

Because of the Republican successes in Indiana and Pennsylvania, and the near certainty of Lincoln's election, the campaign in Virginia turned to the question of what course to take when Lincoln became President. As early as 1856 several Virginia leaders had asserted that the election of a Republican would dissolve the Union. The Whigs, supporters of Douglas, and even some of Breckenridge's followers did not feel that the election of Lincoln was cause for breaking up the Union. In support of Breckenridge's candidacy, Wise said that although he felt that methods other than secession would be more effective for protecting Southern rights, he considered the election of Lincoln as justification for disunion.²⁸

²⁷Ibid., 109.

²⁸Ibid., 113.

The division of the Democratic party resulted, as Douglas had predicted, in the election of a Republican President. On November 6, 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected as the sixteenth President of the United States. In his inaugural address Lincoln seemed to reflect a knowledge of the South's sentiment and urged Southerners to carefully consider its actions:

In your hands, my dissatisfied countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without yourselves being the aggressors. You have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to preserve, protect, and defend it.²⁹

A convention, later known as the Virginia Secession Convention, convened in Richmond on February 13, 1861. The Secessionist faction, made up largely of the Breckenridge Democrats, was led by Lewis E. Harvie and Henry A. Wise. They believed that the doctrine of secession was right, that Virginia's interests bound her to the lower South, and that she should follow the cotton states as soon as possible. The moderates were composed of states' rights Whigs, supporters of Douglas and a few of the Breckenridge followers. This group accepted the doctrine of secession, admitted that the South had just cause, but favored using every means of gaining concessions before applying the right of secession. The Unionists, including

²⁹Inaugural Address of Abraham Lincoln, March 4, 1861.

about fifty delegates, were made up of old national Whigs and a few of the followers of Douglas. They represented the Valley and the northwestern counties of Virginia. Most of this faction denied the right of secession, but opposed the enforcement of Federal laws in a seceded state.

Between February 13th and April 17th the Convention vacillated on the main issue, watching the actions of the Federal government and trying to attain unanimity on a single plan of compromise. On April 12, 1861, Fort Sumter in the harbor of Charleston was fired on by Confederate batteries. By April 15th many of the moderates had shifted to the secessionist side to make the passage of an ordinance of secession possible, but the secessionists were not ready to take that step without unanimous support.³⁰ Many extra-legal conferences and meetings were held in Richmond as the excitement heightened and as delegates were swayed to the side of the secessionists.

On the night of April 16th, at the Exchange Hotel in Richmond, Henry Wise organized the movement to capture Harper's Ferry, Virginia, and the firearms manufactured and stored there.³¹ Gathering together several commanding officers of volunteer cavalry companies and Alfred M.

³⁰Shanks, Secession, 200.

³¹John D. Imboden, Brigadier General, C.S.A., "Jackson at Harper's Ferry in 1861", Battles and Leaders of the Civil War (New York: The Century Company, 1887), Vol. I, 111. Hereafter referred to as Battles and Leaders.

Barbour, former superintendent of the Government works at Harper's Ferry, Wise introduced a scheme which was discussed and quickly agreed upon. The plan was to commence on the following day, as soon as the Convention voted to secede and the concurrence of Governor Letcher had been attained. A committee under the head of Captain John D. Imboden roused Governor Letcher after midnight and informed him of the scheme.³² Reluctant to move without official word from the Convention, Letcher agreed to order the movement by telegraph on the following day as soon as the ordinance of secession was passed. Arms and ammunition were procured and moved to the railway station before sunrise. In an attempt to deceive the Federal government, companies of militia along the railroads were alerted by telegraph for orders from Governor Letcher to aid in the capture of the Portsmouth Navy Yard.³³ The officers departed Richmond at sunrise to prepare their troops.

Wise remained in Richmond and the following day persuaded the Convention to vote by an emotional and eloquent speech. A delegate from western Virginia, Waitman T. Willey of Morgantown, described Wise's action in the hall in the midst of great excitement just before the vote on the ordinance of secession.

³²Imboden, Battles and Leaders, 112.

³³Ibid., 113.

Mr. Wise arose in his seat and drawing a large horse-pistol from his bosom laid it before him on the table and proceeded to harangue the body in the most violent and denunciatory manner. He concluded by taking his watch from his pocket and with glaring eyes and bated breath, declared that events were now transpiring which caused a hush to come over his soul. At such an hour, he said, Harper's Ferry and its armory were in the possession of Virginia soldiers, while at another period the Federal navy yard and property at Norfolk were seized by troops of the State.³⁴

Wise again achieved his 'center-stage' role. The moderate members of the Convention expressed their admiration for Wise's foresight, while the Unionists, when they saw the response to his speech, lost hope of averting the severance of the Union.³⁵ That day, April 17, 1861, the Ordinance of Secession was approved by a vote of eighty-eight to fifty-five.

The order went out from Letcher to seize the Federal arsenal and Major General Kenton Harper, Virginia militia, was instructed to take command. Moving by rail and road, the contingent of infantry, artillery, and cavalry converged on Charleston at midnight on the 17th of April. General Harper moved his force the remaining eight miles and was preparing for an attack at daybreak when a brilliant light indicated that the arsenal had been fired. He marched in, discovered that the Federal guards had fled,

³⁴Stutler, West Virginia, 16, as found in the personal letters of Waitman T. Willey of Morgantown, West Virginia.

³⁵Shanks, Secession, 203.

and took possession too late to salvage anything but the machinery, gun barrels and locks.³⁶ Wise's plan was unintentionally divulged by Alfred Barbour, who had reached Harper's Ferry earlier in the day to persuade the mechanics to join the Southern cause and stay on at higher wages after the arsenal was captured.³⁷ Most of the men agreed but a warning reached the Union guard officer and the arsenal was prepared for destruction. The salvaged materiel was sent to Richmond and Columbia, South Carolina, for the making of Confederate weapons and the militia remained in occupation of the Harper's Ferry arsenal until the middle of June.

The Convention at Richmond adjourned and Henry Wise returned to Norfolk. He nursed a chronic bronchial illness for some weeks, and in May 1861 volunteered his services to the Confederate government at Montgomery. Wise had no previous military training or experience whatever, but like many other leaders of the South who tendered their services, his political experience sufficed as justification for the appointment. Wise's personal desire was to serve in that "post of honor beneath the flag of

³⁶Imboden, Battles and Leaders, 114.

³⁷Ibid., 115.

battle" and, at that time, Southern spirit and not military training was considered the essential quality for leadership.³⁸

Jefferson Davis, a West Point graduate himself, favored the military academy trained officers and recognized the importance of their experience. These men he selected at the very beginning of the war for the higher command positions. Most of the political generals received brigadier commissions and few were promoted beyond that rank by the end of the war. The jealousies created by Davis's appointments and apparent favoritism increasingly surfaced between many of the military and political generals as the war progressed. Intense friction and personal antagonism also existed between some of the political generals because of former party alignments and associations, as will be illustrated in the case of Henry Wise and John Floyd.

Wise would probably have been of greater service in the civil government of the Confederacy, yet his pugnacious nature and romantic ideals led him to seek the battlefield in defense of the Southern cause.³⁹ Edward A. Pollard, a Reconstruction-era historian and editor of the Richmond Examiner in the 1860's, best captured the inability of Wise and others to grasp the realism of the

³⁸Clement Eaton, A History of the Southern Confederacy (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958), 109.

³⁹Eaton, Mind, 90.

bloody conflict so close at hand. During a conversation on the probable deficiency of a supply of improved arms in the South on the eve of war, Wise stated that, "It was not the improved arm, but the improved man, which would win the day; let brave men advance, with flintlocks and old-fashioned bayonets, on the popinjays of the Northern cities - advance on and on, under the fire, reckless of the slain - and [Wise] would answer for it with his life that the Yankees would break and run."⁴⁰ On the occasion of the reception of President Davis in Richmond in May 1861, Wise spoke again:

The man who dares to pray; the man who dares to wait until some magic arm is put into his hand; the man who will not go unless he have a minie, or percussion musket, who will not be content with flint and steel, or even a gun without a lock, is worse than a coward - he is a renegade. Get a spear - a lance. Take a lesson from John Brown. Manufacture your blades from old iron, even though it be the tires of your cartwheels. Get a bit of carriage spring, and grind and burnish it into the shape of a bowie-knife, and put it to any sort of handle, so that it be strong - ash, hickory, oak. But, if possible, get a double-barrelled gun and a dozen rounds of buckshot, and go upon the battlefield with these. If their guns reach further than yours, reduce the distance; meet them foot to foot, eye to eye, body to body, and when you strike a blow, strike home. Your true-blooded Yankee will never stand in the face of cold steel. Let your aim, therefore, be to get into close quarters, and with a few decided, vigorous movements, always pushing forward, never back, my word for it, the soil of Virginia will be swept of the Vandals who are now polluting its atmosphere. ⁴¹

⁴⁰Edward A. Pollard, Lee and His Lieutenants (New York: E. B. Treat and Company, 1867), 562.

⁴¹Pollard, Lee, 563.

It appeared that Wise, who had much of the quick, ardent mind of his countrymen and many of the accomplishments of a scholar, had yet made himself representative of the folly upon which the South entered the war. That other minds quite as great as Wise shared this characteristic delusion of finishing the war in a flourish of bowie-knives, may be taken as a reflection of the popular Southern vanity of the times, insolent almost to madness.⁴² When Wise was informed that Lincoln had called up 70,000 men as the first increment of an army of 700,000 to be equipped and sent against the Confederate states, he was incredulous. When told that the North planned to blockade the Southern ports and cut off all supply lines, Wise stated indignantly that, ". . . it would be contrary to the laws of nations, as had been decided in the Courts of Admiralty, and would be moreover a violation of the Constitution."⁴³ These reflections of short-sighted vanity with respect to the war are not very creditable to Wise; however, they are significant in displaying the romantic attitude of the man about to engage in the military profession of war, and, incidentally, of many of his colleagues with little military experience.

In his letter to the Confederate War Department, Wise requested "an independent partisan command, subject

⁴²Ibid., 562.

⁴³Ibid., 564.

only to the general laws and orders of the service."⁴⁴ Mindless of the need for unity of command in the military strategy of the South, Wise was possessed with the idea of commanding a "Legion" independently and in a manner somewhat reminiscent of eras bygone. Considering that his knowledge of warfare was probably based more upon the classical works of his formal education than upon contemporary military writing, this concept is not surprising. His command became known as, and is more frequently referred to in the records as, the Wise Legion.

On June 6, 1861 the Confederate War Department answered Wise's offer of service and appointed him Brigadier General of Provisional Forces to "rally the people of the Kanawha Valley and the adjoining counties to resist and repel the invading army" Recognizing that time was crucial to Wise's mission, the Confederate government authorized him to rely upon the people of the area for the necessary arms and supplies. Also aware that the loyalty of these people needed to be secured, Wise was instructed to render proper receipts, to ensure timely and adequate remuneration, and to protect the personal and property rights of the inhabitants. Anticipating significantly larger Union forces committed to the object of Lewisburg and the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad, Wise's orders suggested that he exercise economy of force by defending

⁴⁴O.R., Series I, Vol. V, 151.

the mountain passes. By the same letter, Wise was informed of Brigadier General John B. Floyd's mission to protect the Tennessee and Virginia Railroad. He was told of the possible requirement to join forces with Floyd in cooperation against the Federal advance. The letter was specific in assigning Floyd command of the overall force, "according to the Rules and Articles of War" should their junction become necessary.⁴⁵

Floyd had received his appointment in May 1861 and was assigned to his home region of Abingdon and Wytheville to recruit a brigade. The son of a popular Virginia governor, he entered politics in the 1830's. Elected to the State legislature as a Democrat in 1847, he advanced quickly to the governorship in 1849. Floyd supported James Buchanan for President in 1856 and was appointed Secretary of War as part of the Old Dominion's political payment for support of the President-elect.⁴⁶ Floyd, however, became involved in a series of financial scandals that damaged his reputation and forced his resignation in 1860. Many of the old Democrats resented Floyd's mishandling of the War Department and the embarrassment he caused the administration and the Party.⁴⁷ Although

⁴⁵Ibid., Vol. II, 908-909.

⁴⁶John M. Belohlavek, "John B. Floyd and the West Virginia Campaign of 1861", West Virginia History, July, 1968, Vol. 29, 283.

⁴⁷Ibid., 284.

Wise had split with Floyd earlier over the latter's refusal to support him in the gubernatorial campaign of 1853, this latest incident alienated them even further. Wise's desire for an independent command and his dislike for Floyd would make cooperation impossible.

Davis's appointment of Floyd was an act of political appeasement to obtain support of the Richmond Examiner, an important segment of the Southern press headed by John M. Daniel and Edward A. Pollard.⁴⁸ This faction had pushed Joseph E. Johnston when Davis appointed Robert E. Lee to the command of forces in the East. Wise probably was aware of the circumstances under which Floyd received his appointment, since Wise's son was the editor of the Richmond Enquirer. All things considered, including Wise's personality, Floyd probably commanded little, if any respect from Henry Wise as the 'senior' commander. A conflict between the two seemed inevitable, given the necessity of a junction of their forces.

⁴⁸Ibid.

CHAPTER II

The Strategic Importance of Western Virginia

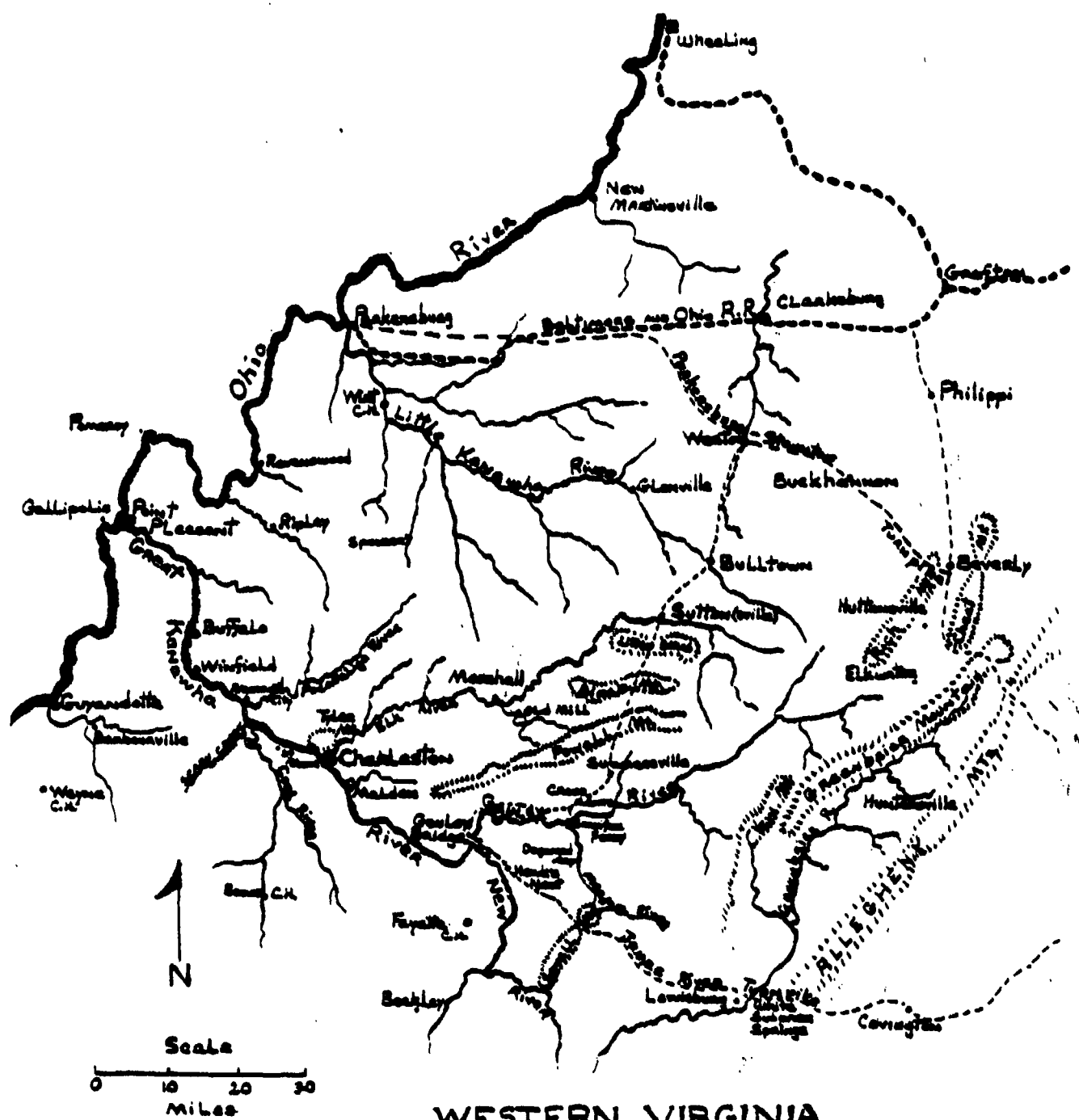
On the brink of civil war in 1861, the Old Dominion had become strategically important to both the North and the South. Stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Ohio River, Virginia represented an excellent line of defense as well as a route of invasion for either side. Her secession greatly threatened the Union, extending the southern Confederacy to the doorstep of the nation's capital. Western Virginia, bordering on the free states of Ohio and Pennsylvania on the northwest and the District of Columbia on the north, was perceived as a route of advance for Confederate forces to the industrialized cities of the North. Therefore, this key area received the immediate attention of the Federal Government and became the scene for the first campaign of the Civil War.

In the east the disputed territory is bordered by the Allegheny Mountains, ranging in elevation from 2,500 to 3,500 feet above sea level. In the west, the Ohio River flowed some 250 miles from Chester in the north to Kenova in the south (see map at Figure 2). Three major subdivisions can be geographically delineated between these borders; the Allegheny highlands, the Cumberland plateau, and the Ohio River district.

Figure 2

Western Virginia in 1861

Drawn from O.R., Atlas, Vol III, Plates 140-141.



1861

The Allegheny highlands lay close to the western side of the mountains and extended from southwestern Virginia to the Pennsylvania line. This area was sparsely settled because of the unevenness of the surface and the lack of cultivable land.¹ Its narrow valleys, steep slopes, and unnavigable rivers made transportation very difficult.

Extending west from the highlands to a line running approximately from Charleston to Grafton stood the Cumberland plateau. A table-land from 1,000 to 2,000 feet above sea level, its rugged surface was characterized by narrow valleys, rapid streams, and rocky soil. Almost as thinly populated as the Allegheny highlands, its small farms existed on the production of such staples as wheat, corn, and tobacco.²

The Ohio River district was also uneven in surface, but its rolling hills and fertile valleys made it the most prosperous farming section in western Virginia.³ Many rivers and streams flowed west through this area to the Ohio River providing an outlet for farm products, minerals, and products of the small manufacturing plants in the river towns. The most populated of the three areas, the

¹Shanks, Secession, 2.

²Ibid., 3.

³Ibid.

Ohio River district contained the majority of western Virginia's 376,688 inhabitants in 1860.⁴

Most of the region was a part of the Ohio River watershed. The major rivers in the region were the Little Kanawha with its mouth at Parkersburg, the Great Kanawha in the south which emptied the New and Gauley Rivers from the plateau, and the Greenbrier River in the highlands between the Greenbrier and Allegheny Mountains. Only the Great Kanawha was navigable for any significant distance. Light steamboats passed from the Ohio River to a point just below the Gauley Bridge; however it was nearly forty miles before either wagons or infantry could ford the stream above the junction of the New and Gauley rivers.⁵

Lines of communication between eastern and western Virginia were severely limited. Sectional feelings and the Appalachian mountain range had been a barrier to extensive transportation development between Virginia proper and the western region. Only two major east-west roads traversed the mountains in 1861, the Parkersburg-Staunton Turnpike in the north and the James River Turnpike in the south. The latter connected the Kanawha River with Covington in the Shenandoah Valley by way of Lewisburg and

⁴James M. Callahan, Semi-Centennial History of West Virginia (-----: Semi-Centennial Commission of West Virginia, 1913), 222.

⁵Jacob D. Cox, Military Reminiscences of the Civil War (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), I, 80.

White Sulphur Springs in the mountains. The second route ran northwest from Staunton, crossed the Allegheny and Cheat mountain ranges, and passed through Beverly and over Rich Mountain. From that point it ran over the hilly plateau country through Buckhannon and Weston to Parkersburg on the Ohio River. A canal had been chartered to connect the headwaters of the James River with the Kanawha in the south but was never completed. The Covington and Ohio Railroad was chartered to follow the proposed route of the canal but had not been finished in 1861.⁶ There were no trans-Allegheny railroads when the war began.

In the northwest, the Baltimore and Ohio and the Northwestern railroads, built by private subscription and without state aid, offered excellent connections to Washington, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, and the West. As a result, most people in the northwest had few business or social acquaintances in Richmond. In the 1850's, Governor Henry Wise, aware of the advantage of linking the west to the east, had chartered road and turnpike companies to make these transportation improvements. In 1860, the legislature appropriated money for making the Kanawha River more navigable and for completing the Covington and Ohio Railroad.⁷ It was too late. By 1861, most western

⁶Shanks, Secession, 8.

⁷Ibid., 8-9.

Virginians had developed business and social ties outside Virginia.

Several military, economic, political and psychological factors rendered the territory of western Virginia important to the Confederacy as well as to the Union. Because they are interrelated, they will not be discussed in any particular priority

Security of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and the Ohio River was the most important military-economic factor for the Union. It was the lifeline on which the Federal Government relied for the transportation of troops, food, and other supplies to conduct war. Products from the factories of the northeast were shipped via these lines to the West. Federal occupation of all of western Virginia was critical to the protection of this lifeline because the Ohio River comprised 250 miles of the western border.

Conversely, the South relied on the Tennessee and Virginia Railroad as the only direct route connecting Virginia with the cotton states of the lower South. Products from Richmond, Petersburg, Danville and Lynchburg were shipped by this line to Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. Confederate occupation of the Kanawha Valley, at a minimum, was necessary to protect this line from Federal interdiction.

Militarily, the counties west of the Alleghenies represented an additional population base for the recruitment of soldiers. Although the total population was less

than 400,000 in 1860, by war's end approximately 32,000 men had been enlisted by the Union and 10,000 by the Confederates from this region. This was more than ten percent of the population. Most of these men saw action throughout the war as members of separate companies incorporated into various Union and Confederate regiments.⁸

Mineral resources needed by both the North and the South were abundant in western Virginia. This area produced nearly three times the tonnage in iron as that of the territory east of the Alleghenies.⁹ Mason, on the Ohio River, mined about one-third of the state's coal, and Ohio County produced an equal percentage of bar-iron. Gas and oil had been discovered in the Kanawha and Monongahela valleys in the 1840s and offered great promise for industry. Wheeling had already become the second largest manufacturing center in the state, behind Richmond. The salt mines of the Kanawha Valley represented a major source for the South. These works were producing 2,500,000 bushels of salt per year just before the War, and this was considered by some to be sufficient to supply the needs of the entire Confederacy.¹⁰ Salt was an absolute necessity for the preservation and seasoning of foodstuffs, as well

⁸Stutler, West Virginia, vi.

⁹Shanks, Secession, 3.

¹⁰Ella Lonn, Salt as a Factor in the Confederacy (New York: Walter Neale Company, 1933), 19-20.

as for the production of gunpowder. Not particularly a factor to the agrarian South, but of importance to the more populated North, were the fertile valleys of the Ohio River district, which produced wheat, corn, rye, oats and buckwheat.¹¹

As previously mentioned, western Virginia represented an access route for the invasion of the North or South by military forces stationed within the region. The industrialized heart of the North lay just beyond Wheeling and within striking distance of Confederate forces that could be secured in the easily defended mountainous terrain of northwestern Virginia. In the southwest, a Union army secured in the mountains south of the Kanawha Valley could easily sever Virginia from Tennessee, Kentucky and the cotton states by interdicting the Tennessee and Virginia Railroad. From this area opened a natural avenue of approach into North and South Carolina. Whoever controlled the Kanawha Valley could also interdict the Ohio River or use it for access to the North or the West. Likewise, Union forces holding the Valley would have the Allegheny Mountains as a natural barrier for flank protection.

To the South, a great psychological victory was to be gained by the subjugation of Unionists in western Virginia, and by the denial of this section of Virginia to

¹¹Shanks, Secession, 8.

the North. This victory would have unified Virginia regarding secession and would have greatly boosted Southern morale. Conversely, if the Confederate forces were denied the Kanawha Valley, it would discourage not only Southern sympathizers in western Virginia, but also those of regions just to the east of the mountains. Additionally, a victory in western Virginia would help to vindicate the U.S. Army for its defeat at "Bull Run".

The region of western Virginia was not initially regarded as the key to the Union's overall military strategy. General Winfield Scott, commander of U.S. forces, had devised the "Anaconda Plan" of occupying the Mississippi Valley and blockading Southern ports to isolate the Confederacy. However, George B. McClellan replaced Scott soon after the war began and he had always viewed the Kanawha Valley as an excellent invasion route to the heart of the South.¹² McClellan initiated this planning while still commander of the Department of the Ohio preparing for the first campaign of the Civil War.

The Western Virginia Campaign of 1861 included all military actions west of the Allegheny Mountains from the Battle of Philippi on June 3 to Cotton Hill and the series of skirmishes which occurred in Fayette County in mid-November, 1861. The primary objective of both Union

¹²O.R., Series I, Vol. I, 338.

and Confederate forces during this campaign was the military occupation of that territory between the Ohio River and the Allegheny Mountains. The campaign unfolded in two phases; that action in the northeast directed by General George B. McClellan in opposition to Lee's efforts to organize Confederate resistance, and another action led by General Jacob D. Cox in the southwest. Henry A. Wise's involvement in this second phase was centered in the Kanawha Valley and began with his arrival in Charleston on June 26.

However, much had transpired in western Virginia before Wise's arrival that had a direct bearing on the military situation in the Kanawha. In order to establish a chronological perspective, events as they occurred in northwestern Virginia following the Secession Convention must be developed first.

The public opinion of northwestern Virginia was varied; those whose sentiments lay with the South could be found in every part, but they were usually outnumbered by Northern supporters.¹³ Lincoln received only two thousand votes from this region, but most of the citizens were more willing to abide by the consequences of the election than to secede from the Union.¹⁴ Many public meetings

¹³James C. McGregor, The Disruption of Virginia (New York: -----, 1922), 81.

¹⁴Charles H. Ambler, Makers of West Virginia (Huntington, W.Va.: Gentry Brothers, Printers, 1942), 9.

were held to discuss the impending secession of Virginia, and resolutions were adopted calling for support of the Constitution and the Union. Most of the northwestern newspapers reflected pro-Union sentiment. Editorials in the Clarksburg Guard, Morgantown Star, Wheeling Intelligencer, and Grafton Western Virginian advocated that the western region should remain at least neutral, and at best pro-Union.¹⁵ Archibald Campbell, editor of the Intelligencer, proposed that, if efforts to avert secession failed, the region should split from the state to form a new Western Virginia which would remain in the Union (see Figure 3).¹⁶ When the Ordinance of Secession was approved by a vote of 88 to 55 on April 17, 1861, the forty-seven delegates from what is now West Virginia voted: "thirty-two against the ordinance, eleven in favor of it, and four passed."¹⁷

On April 22, a meeting was called at Clarksburg by several delegates who had returned home from Richmond.¹⁸ An address condemning the secession of Virginia was printed and distributed to the newspapers. A convention of delegates from all the counties of northwestern Virginia was held May 13 at Wheeling. The First Wheeling

¹⁵McGregor, Disruption, 75.

¹⁶Stutler, West Virginia, 12.

¹⁷Ambler, Makers, 10.

¹⁸Charles H. Ambler, West Virginia, The Mountain State (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1940), 323.

Figure 3

Sectional Division of Virginia in 1860

Convention was attended by 436 delegates from twenty-seven counties who laid the groundwork for the Restored Government of Virginia.¹⁹ National interest was so aroused that leading newspapers such as the New York Times, Cincinnati Commercial, Pittsburgh Dispatch and Chicago Press and Chicago Tribune sent reporters to observe and record this unprecedented movement -- a secession within a secession.²⁰ After three days of debate concerning what course of action western Virginia should follow, it was determined to issue a call for a second convention on June 11. In the meantime, western Virginia would wait for the results of the Virginia-wide referendum on secession to be held on May 23. If approved, the possibility of reuniting Virginia was remote, and there would be no need to hold the second convention.

Meanwhile, Unionists busily recruited soldiers and prepared for hostilities. Many of the men who took the initiative in forming military units were also in the forefront of the organization of the new government. The first regiment recruited for Union service was the First (West) Virginia Volunteer Infantry inducted at Wheeling on May 15 under the command of Colonel Benjamin F. Kelley. In mid-May, another regiment composed of ten companies of Wheeling home guard was placed under the command of

¹⁹Stutler, West Virginia, 11.

²⁰Ambler, West Virginia, 327.

Chester D. Hubbard, former Unionist delegate to the Secession Convention.²¹ By late May, the Unionists had firmly entrenched themselves in the northwest from Wheeling to Grafton.

Across the Ohio River, Governor William Dennison was preparing for the defense of Ohio's southern border. On April 23, Dennison commissioned Brigadier General Jacob D. Cox to assemble Ohio troops and prepare them for the coming conflict. George B. McClellan, who had resigned his commission as a Regular Army Captain after the Crimean War, was recruited by the Governor to command the Ohio state troops.²² He was given the rank of Major General. Although Ohio's quota was only 10,000 troops, McClellan wrote General Winfield Scott that the state would supply 50,000 troops if desired. McClellan asked for arms, ammunition, supplies, and some regular troops for a grand plan which involved an area much larger than the state of Ohio. Indeed, it consisted of a series of plans for general military operations in the west. Scott sent these plans to President Lincoln and pointed out deficiencies such as the use of three-month volunteers for an offense against Richmond from the Ohio Valley. Scott used this opportunity to embellish his own "Anaconda Plan" and denounced the former as a piecemeal operation which

²¹Stutler, West Virginia, 4.

²²William S. Myers, General George Brinton McClellan (New York: Appleton-Century Company, 1934), 160.

could not compare with his own proposed plan of envelopment.²³ In actuality, Lincoln may have taken the plans as an indication of McClellan's ability and foresight -- the 'deficiency' as a prediction that the war was going to last more than three months.

The Department of the Ohio was created May 3 and included the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, a part of western Pennsylvania, and western Virginia north of the Great Kanawha River. McClellan was appointed major general in the regular Army on May 14 and placed in charge of the newly created department. He continued to oversee the induction and training of soldiers in his department while eagerly formulating plans for the entire Army.²⁴

While Union companies were being formed in northwestern Virginia and armed for Federal service, many of the pro-Southerners were writing Governor Letcher at Richmond for support from the Confederacy.²⁵ Letcher forwarded these letters to General Robert E. Lee, in command of the Virginia forces, and on April 29 Lee directed Major Anthony Loring, supposedly commanding volunteers at Wheeling, to accept and muster into service such companies

²³O.R., Series I, Vol. LI, Part I, 333, 338-339.

²⁴Myers, McClellan, 165.

²⁵Robert B. Boehm, "The Civil War in West Virginia" (Ohio State University, PhD, 1957), 23; O.R., Series I, Vol. LI, Part II, 31.

as might offer themselves, and to take command of them.²⁶ Lee had planned to locate a Confederate regiment at Wheeling, one at Parkersburg, three at Grafton at the railroad center, one at Harpers Ferry, and one more at the mouth of the Kanawha River.²⁷ His strategy was to prevent mass meetings and conventions that were being held in protest of secession and, at the same time, to recruit soldiers for the Southern cause. In early May, Lee ordered Major Francis M. Boykin, of Weston, to call out the militia and recruit an army with concentration points at Parkersburg, Grafton, and Wheeling. On May 4, he directed Colonel George A. Porterfield, of Charles Town, then stationed at Harpers Ferry, to proceed to Grafton and take command of the Virginia forces ordered to assemble at that place. He was ordered to protect the terminus of the Wheeling-Parkersburg branches of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad.²⁸

General Lee's efforts to thwart the Unionists came too late. When Porterfield arrived at Grafton, he found a company of Union soldiers being organized and apparently in control. He withdrew and reported to Lee that the sympathy of the people at Grafton was almost wholly with the Union. On May 14, he requested that reinforcements be

²⁶O.R., Series I, Vol. II, 788.

²⁷Stutler, West Virginia, 24.

²⁸O.R., Series I, Vol. II, 790-791, 802, 843.

sent to him from Harpers Ferry as he slowly assembled troops around Grafton. Lee, however, felt that the local population would be better conciliated if troops from other parts of the same region were sent to Grafton. Lee gave authority to Colonel J. M. Heck to recruit a regiment in the valley and mountain counties on the road to Grafton.²⁹ By May 23, Porterfield had approximately 550 men but, like other Confederate units trying to organize, he lacked arms and ammunition in sufficient quantity.

The same day that the people of Virginia voted on the Ordinance of Secession, Porterfield marched on Grafton. Virginia had joined the Confederacy on May 7, therefore the referendum was really a moot point. Porterfield found no resistance at Grafton, but soon learned that Colonel Ben Kelley had entrained at Wheeling followed by the Sixteenth Ohio Regiment from McClellan's department. Both units were bound for Grafton. On the 25th and 27th of May, Porterfield destroyed several bridges on both branches of the Baltimore and Ohio, and upon hearing that Ohio troops crossed the river at Parkersburg, he withdrew his force to Philippi on May 28.³⁰ As an example of the confused Confederate situation, Porterfield received a dispatch from Letcher on the evening before he left Grafton which ordered him to seize

²⁹Ibid., 843, 833-834, 254.

³⁰Ibid., 44-45, 51.

a train, proceed to Wheeling, and capture the city and all arms that might be stored there.³¹ Additional companies from the surrounding area joined Porterfield at Grafton, and by June 1 his small force numbered about 600 infantry and 175 cavalry.³²

In Ohio, McClellan delayed Governor Dennison's importunities to move forces across the Ohio River, while he increased the number of regiments available from the original quota of thirteen to twenty-two. Finally, when McClellan received news of the destruction of the bridges, he ordered regiments stationed along the Ohio River to cross on the 27th of May and ordered Colonel Kelley's Virginia regiment at Wheeling to move along the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad toward Grafton.³³ The 14th and 18th Ohio Regiments were instructed to take possession of Parkersburg and move toward Grafton. Brigadier General Thomas Morris of Indiana was ordered to Grafton on May 30 with the 6th, 7th, and 9th Indiana Regiments.³⁴ By June 1, approximately 3,000 Union troops had been consolidated at Grafton under General Morris's command while McClellan remained in Ohio.³⁵ The Confederate forces in Philippi numbered less than 800.

³¹Boehm, "Civil War", 27.

³²Stutler, West Virginia, 26.

³³O.R., Series I, Vol. II, 44-45.

³⁴O.R., Series I, Vol. LI, Part I, 393-394.

³⁵Cox, Reminiscences, I, 43.

On June 3, Morris sent two columns upon the Confederates at Philippi, Kelley from the east with 1600 men and Colonel Ebenezer Dumont from the west with 1400 men, in an attempt to capture Porterfield's force.³⁶ The signal for a consolidated attack at 4:00 A.M. was spoiled by a local civilian, and Dumont attacked without Kelley in position. The untrained and undisciplined Confederates abandoned their guns, tents, and supplies in a hasty retreat toward the town of Beverly. The Federal forces, exhausted from the long night march, did not pursue. Porterfield rallied his force a few miles south of town and retreated to Beverly and later to Huttonsville.

Philippi, first land battle of the Civil War was almost bloodless; Colonel Kelley and four of his men were wounded, while the Confederates suffered only two wounded.³⁷ However, it demonstrated to Confederate military authorities that a much larger and better equipped force was required to deal with the situation in northwestern Virginia. Although the victory was greatly exaggerated by the Northern newspapers, this initial success served to bolster the Unionists in western Virginia.³⁸

The Battle of Philippi served to spark the Second Wheeling Convention into action on June 11. Delegates

³⁶O.R., Series I, Vol. II, 67-68.

³⁷Stutler, West Virginia, 27.

³⁸Boehm, "Civil War", 41.

from twenty-five counties adopted a resolution entitled: "An Ordinance for the Reorganization of the State Government."³⁹ The plan declared all state offices vacated by act of secession, called for the election of loyal Union men to fill the vacancies, and asked the Federal Government to recognize these officials. A resolution thanking General McClellan for having rescued northwestern Virginia from the Confederates was also adopted.⁴⁰ The Convention adjourned with the election of Francis H. Pierpont as Governor and an address to the remaining counties of western Virginia appealing for loyalty to the Union.⁴¹ Pierpont sent a formal request for aid to the Federal Government, and President Lincoln, through Secretary of War Simon Cameron, gave Pierpont authority to raise troops and request arms and supplies even though the new state was not officially recognized by either the President or Congress.⁴²

At Huttonsville, Colonel Porterfield was relieved of command by General Lee, and Colonel Robert S. Garnett was promoted to Brigadier General and placed in command of all troops in northwestern Virginia. As companies were formed

³⁹Stutler, West Virginia, 13.

⁴⁰Ambler, West Virginia, 329-330.

⁴¹Charles H. Ambler, Francis H. Pierpont: Union War Governor of West Virginia and Father of West Virginia (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1937), 102-103.

⁴²Stutler, West Virginia, 14.

throughout the area, they joined the Confederate force at Huttonsville. When General Garnett arrived on June 14, he found twenty-three companies of infantry in dire need of arms, clothing, equipment, instruction and discipline. He organized two regiments, the 31st Virginia under Lieutenant Colonel William F. Jackson and the 25th Virginia under Colonel J. M. Heck, and moved to Beverly on June 15. Heck's regiment occupied the pass by which the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike crossed Rich Mountain, while Garnett went with Jackson's regiment to occupy the pass over Laurel Hill, where the road from Beverly crossed on its way to Philippi, Grafton, and Wheeling. Garnett regarded these passes as key terrain from which they could threaten the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. His intention was to attack the railroad, but he felt that his force was too small when he first occupied the passes to make a successful movement against it.⁴³

On June 25, Garnett transmitted his plan for a raid on the railroad trestle and Union guard force at Cheat Bridge. Lee replied that the capture of the railroad at Cheat River would be worth an army to the South. Garnett, however, felt that he needed additional forces to hold the passes and capture the railroad instead of conducting a raid against it. He reported that he had only 4,500 men,

⁴³O.R., Series I, Vol. II, 71-72, 236-238.

of which no less than 2,000 were required to hold the passes, and he requested 3,000 or 4,000 more men if they could be spared.⁴⁴ Reinforcements were sent as the battle of Rich Mountain started to unfold.

When Garnett assumed command, McClellan was still in Ohio and the regiments which had taken part in the Philippi action were located at Grafton, Philippi, Buckhannon, Parkersburg and various points along the railroad between Grafton and the Ohio River.⁴⁵ The Union regiments were so scattered that it probably appeared to Garnett that the Union forces had no immediate plans for further offensive movements. In a report to General Lee, he said that the enemy " . . . has as much of the northwestern country as he probably wants." Garnett saw his mission as one of representing just enough of a threat to hold large numbers of Union troops in western Virginia which might otherwise be used against the Confederates elsewhere. In keeping with this strategy, he suggested that General Wise in the Kanawha Valley move in a northerly direction toward the country east of Parkersburg so as to threaten Weston and Buckhannon. This, he said, would greatly aid his own command and would at the same time keep the Kanawha Valley free by occupying the Union forces

⁴⁴Ibid., 236-238, 239.

⁴⁵Boehm, "Civil War", 48.

in northwestern Virginia.⁴⁶ Wise was yet unopposed by Federal troops in the Valley, but General Cox had been concentrating a strong force at Gallipolis just across the Ohio River from Point Pleasant at the mouth of the Kanawha River.

General Lee, learning that a Union movement was planned, did not agree with Garnett about McClellan's intentions. He replied that the enemy would drive all the way to Staunton, if possible.⁴⁷ Lee apparently perceived a strategic advantage in such a movement that McClellan did not. McClellan arrived in Grafton on June 22 to press forward with his campaign in western Virginia. In a message to the War Department on the 23rd, he outlined his plan and said he would drive the enemy back from Beverly and into the mountains east of Huttonsville, but would not pursue him farther, unless circumstances made success certain.⁴⁸ A drive through the mountains to Staunton would have radically altered the military situation in eastern Virginia by threatening General Joseph E. Johnston's forces around Winchester. Since Grafton had already been established as the principal base for supplies, the movement would have been logistically possible. McClellan might have prevented

⁴⁶O.R., Series I, Vol. II, 240-242.

⁴⁷Ibid., 242, 895.

⁴⁸O.R., Series I, Vol. II, 195.

Johnston's participation in the battle of First Manassas.⁴⁹ This was the strategic advantage perceived by Lee. McClellan's planning characteristically lacked the presence of long range objectives that were in concert with the strategy of the whole, and this defect became apparent as soon as McClellan was given overall command of the Union forces following the campaign in western Virginia.⁵⁰

For the remainder of June and the first week of July, McClellan completed his plans and positioned his forces to advance on Garnett. As with the preparation for crossing the Ohio River, he was not going to move until everything was ready. This included a coordinated effort against the southwestern part of the state. On July 2, he sent orders to General Cox to begin his movement into the Kanawha Valley. McClellan was still interested in the possibilities of invading Virginia through the Kanawha Valley and in preparation for such an operation he felt that the Confederate forces occupying that area must be cleared out.⁵¹ Meanwhile, Brigadier General Henry A. Wise was busily organizing forces and preparing defensive positions around Charleston where he had arrived on June 26.

⁴⁹Boehm, "Civil War", 50.

⁵⁰T. Harry Williams, Lincoln and His Generals (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), 27, 30-31.

⁵¹O.R., Series I, Vol. II, 197, 195-197.

CHAPTER III

Wise's Operations In the Kanawha Valley

Henry A. Wise had no previous military training or experience whatever. Chosen for the assignment because of his political prominence and supposed popularity in western Virginia, the General was presented with a difficult task. He was responsible for the recruitment, training, organization, arming, and subsistence of a military force among people who, in part, were indifferent or even hostile to the Southern cause and who foresaw Union occupation.

The sentiment of the citizens of southwestern Virginia was, in all probability, as equally divided as it was among the citizens in the northwest. While the population in the tributary valleys of the New, Gauley, and Greenbrier Rivers were solidly pro-Southern, the citizens between Gauley Bridge and Point Pleasant were more evenly divided in their opinions, with those in the Kanawha Valley proper from Buffalo to the Ohio being predominantly pro-Union.¹ Lines of communication and proximity to

¹George E. Moore, "West Virginia and the Civil War" (University of Chicago, PhD, 1921), 303, as taken from David E. Johnston, History of the Middle New River Settlements and Contiguous Territory (Huntington, West Virginia: Standard Printing and Publishing, 1906), 186.

economic ties at either end of the valley were partly responsible for this polarization. The situation was the result of several factors.

First, nearly all the local officials and leading men of the southwest section were either Secessionists or neutrals, and their newspapers were strongly for states' rights and a Southern Confederacy.² Slavery was more predominant in the southwest and was increasing. The territory north of the Great Kanawha Valley had fewer slaves in 1860 than in 1850; whereas in the southwest the reverse was true.³ Geographical proximity to the Confederacy in the southwest region either influenced or intimidated many of the citizens in a manner not unlike the way the North influenced northwestern Virginia. Finally, the presence of Virginia troops in the Valley, and the tardiness of the Union invasion, greatly weakened the Unionists of the region and strengthened the Secessionists.⁴

As early as April, 1861, the governor of Virginia received a call for small arms and cannon to make possible a mass uprising of the people of the Kanawha in defense of their homes. Governor Letcher received a letter from a J. G. Newman dated April 21, stating that only three companies in the valley were armed, but that every county in

²Ibid., 304.

³Shanks, Secession, 8.

⁴Moore, "West Virginia," 305.

the region was ready to send one or more companies, "to defend the state or to fight wherever you may command them to go to fight for the cause of Virginia and the South."⁵ The next day he received another from Robert T. Harvey of Putnam Court-House warning of the danger of early invasion of the Kanawha sections by the Ohioans. Harvey closed with the assurance that the people of the Kanawha were "heart and soul with you in the defense of the State."⁶

On May 3, 1861, Christopher Q. Tompkins, a West Point graduate and respected businessman of Charleston, was commissioned Colonel of Virginia volunteers by Governor Letcher and assigned to command all troops "as may be called out in Kanawha."⁷ To assist Tompkins, Lieutenant Colonel John McCausland was sent from the faculty of the Virginia Military Institute to muster companies into State service as they were organized.⁸ McCausland set up a recruiting headquarters at Buffalo, while Colonel Tompkins established Camp Tompkins near the mouth of the Coal River fourteen miles west of Charleston to train existing volunteer units. A number of leading men in the area joined in the effort and organized both

⁵O.R., Series I, Vol. LI, Part II, 23.

⁶Ibid., 25.

⁷Ibid., Vol. II, 808.

⁸Ibid., 788.

infantry and cavalry companies for Tompkins' command. By mid-May a considerable force was enrolled under the Virginia flag. The Unionists made no corresponding effort to enroll counterforces, but many of the young men slipped away to the northern counties or across the Ohio to enlist in Union companies.⁹

On May 27, Colonel Tompkins notified the State government of Federal troop concentrations at Gallipolis and other places along the Ohio border.¹⁰ In the same report he summarized the situation in the Kanawha Valley:

. . . Great excitement prevails in this region. The divided sentiment of the people adds to the confusion, and, except the few loyal companies now mustered into the service of the State, there are few of the people who sympathize with the secession policy.

The Federal troops encamped at Gallipolis reassured the loyal citizens and invitations to invade the Kanawha

⁹Stutler, West Virginia, 50.

¹⁰O.R., Series I, Vol. II, 688.

Valley were extended to the commanding officer there, to General McClellan, and to Governor Dennison of Ohio.¹¹ However, more powerful forces operated to delay this movement.

As previously mentioned, McClellan believed that his true line of operations lay along the Kanawha Valley as an invasion route to eastern Virginia and the Carolinas. Certain unilateral actions by leading citizens of the Valley persuaded McClellan that a movement into the area would be resented by the people of the region and would be more damaging than otherwise to the Union cause.¹² On May 27, Judge George M. Summers, former delegate to the Secession Convention and advocate of neutrality, visited the Federal camp at Gallipolis to convince Congressman V. B. Horton and other Ohio officials that such action ". . . would be regarded in the light of an invasion, and would likely unite all classes in its repulsion. All we ask is to be let alone."¹³ In order to carry the same message to McClellan, a committee composed of Judge Lewis Ruffner and Colonel B. F. Smith was accredited by Horton and dispatched to Cincinnati. McClellan was convinced that these

¹¹Moore, "West Virginia," 306.

¹²O.R., Series I, Vol. II, 656.

¹³Moore, "West Virginia," 307.

men represented the sentiment of the Unionists in the Valley and, since he had information that there were no eastern Virginian or Confederate troops in that region, he postponed the movement and modified his original plan to concentrate first on the operation at Grafton.¹⁴

The unilateral actions of Summers and his friends stimulated counter efforts by the more genuinely Unionist elements. Petitions were drawn up and a committee was sent to McClellan denouncing Ruffner and Smith and urging speedy occupation.¹⁵ McClellan, however, had already presented his rationale for a change of plans to the War Department in Washington.

By the end of May, Colonel Tompkins had seven infantry companies, three companies of cavalry, and an artillery unit with two field pieces.¹⁶ Only five hundred muskets and four artillery pieces had been sent from Richmond at McCausland's request. The command needed additional arms, ammunition, tents, blankets, cartridge boxes and percussion caps, and Tompkins made his requirements known to both Lee and the authorities in Richmond.¹⁷ As the recruits came in they were quickly assimilated into provisional companies. By the time General Wise arrived,

¹⁴O.R., op cit.

¹⁵Moore, "West Virginia," 309.

¹⁶Stutler, West Virginia, 50.

¹⁷O.R., Series I, Vol. II, 888.

Tompkins was able to organize two skeleton infantry regiments, the First and Second Kanawha, which later became the 22d and 36th Virginia Infantry, CSA.¹⁸ In addition, he had seven independent companies and three companies of mounted rangers which were organized into a battalion and formed the nucleus of the 8th Virginia Cavalry, CSA. The 22d Infantry was commanded by Colonel George S. Patton, grandfather of General George S. Patton of World War II fame.¹⁹

General Wise departed Richmond by rail on June 13th escorted by Virginia's oldest military organization, the Richmond Light Infantry Blues commanded by his son, O. Jennings Wise.²⁰ The entourage included a full staff of twelve officers and two companies of cavalry. On his staff were two excellent field grade officers capable of applying sound tactical doctrine to Wise's desires. Colonels Charles F. Henningsen and Frank Anderson had had valuable experience; the latter with William Walker in Nicaragua and the former in numerous European wars with Louis Kossuth before coming to America.²¹ Another staff

¹⁸Stutler, West Virginia, 50.

¹⁹Ibid., 51.

²⁰Louis H. Manarin and Lew A. Wallace, Jr., Richmond Volunteers, 1861 - 1865 (Richmond: Civil War Centennial Committee, 1969), 265.

²¹Wise, Life of Wise, 286.

member, Colonel J. L. Davis, remained in Richmond to gather additional volunteer companies and to join the "Legion" in Charleston.²²

Arriving at Lewisburg, Greenbrier County, on June 14, Wise encamped on the fair grounds until the 17th of June to recruit troops for his force. He was well-received by the local populace and spirits were high.²³ The Richmond Blues were mustered into Confederate States service for the duration of the war and became Company A, 59th Regiment Virginia Infantry, Wise Legion.²⁴ Wise moved to Gauley Bridge on the 18th and remained there until June 25, further increasing the size of his force. Feasted and feted by the people from Lewisburg to Gauley Bridge, Malden, and other points along the route of march, Wise entered Charleston on June 26 (see map at Figure 4). The occupation of Charleston was unopposed, but there were no welcoming parties either. The two factions were reticent.

Charleston appeared to be the logical point for the center of military operations in the lower Kanawha Valley, since it was the largest town in the region and a hub of communications for the valley. Wise made an assessment of the area and settled into camp on the Littlepage farm two

²²O.R., Series I, Vol. II, 974-975.

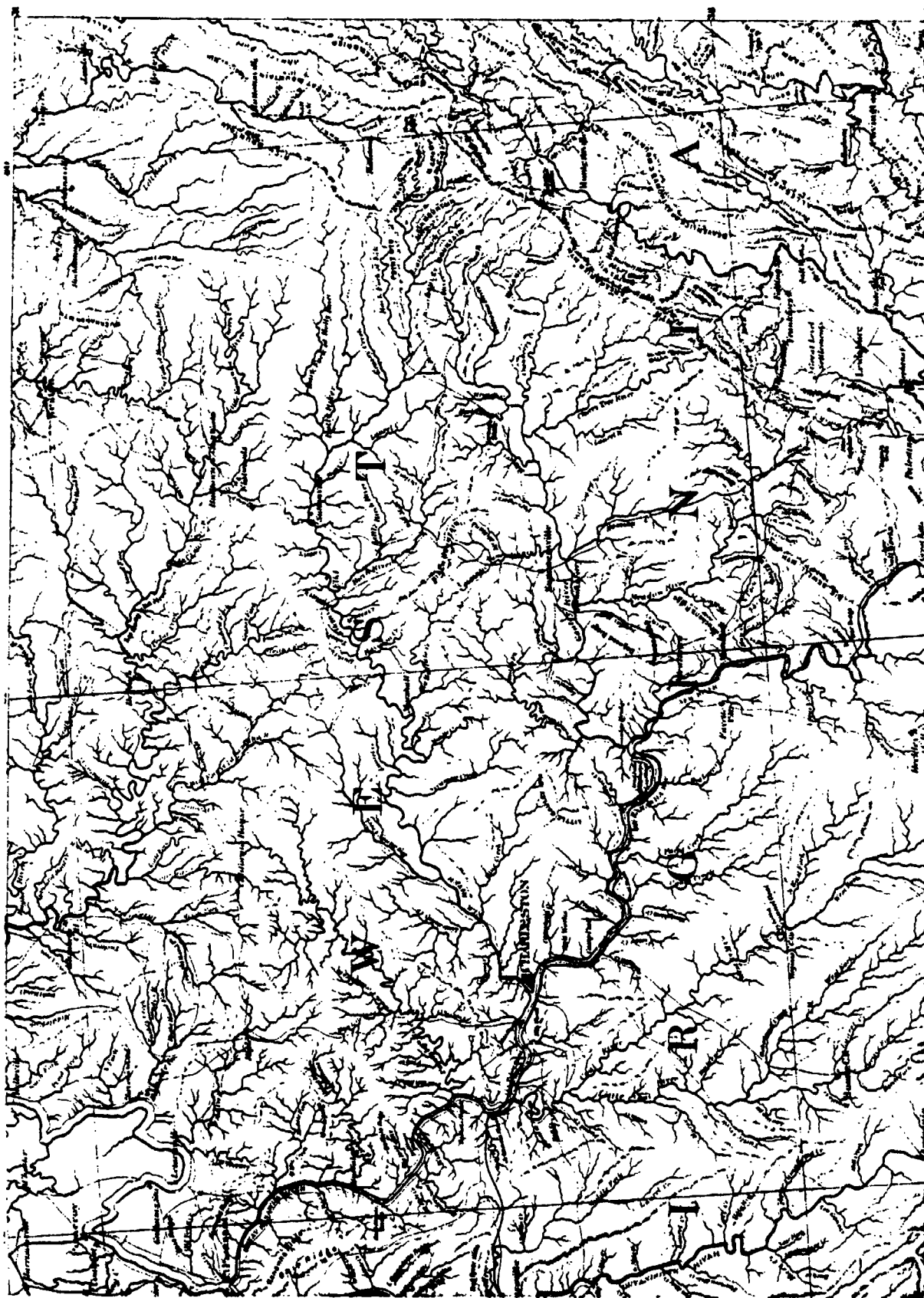
²³Stutler, West Virginia, 64.

²⁴Manarin, Richmond Volunteers, 265.

Figure 4

Kanawha Valley, 1861

Extracted from O.R., Atlas, Vol. III, Plate 141.



miles west of Charleston. Appropriately, the cantonement was named Camp Two-Mile, but it was also referred to in some reports as Camp Lee. Wise wasted no time in sending out probing forces to the vicinity of Ripley, Spencer, and Glenville, aware that Union forces had already crossed the Ohio River in the northwest. These were merely demonstrations in force to strengthen the faith of the dissidents, intimidate the Union element, and gather recruits for the Legion.²⁵

On June 30, the Richmond Blues and Kanawha Riflemen arrived at Ripley and discovered that four companies of Ohio troops were stationed at Ravenswood fifteen miles distant on the Ohio River. On the 4th of July, Wise joined the two companies at Ripley and harangued the people with one of his characteristic long speeches and distributed handbills appealing for support of the Confederacy. He said:

Virginia has seceded from the old and formed a new Confederacy; she has commanded and we must obey her voice. I come to execute her commands, to hold out the olive branch to the true and peaceful citizens, to repel invasion from abroad and subdue treason only at home.²⁶

Then, declining an engagement with the Union troops at Ravenswood, Wise returned to Charleston with the two companies following.

²⁵Stutler, West Virginia, 64-65.

²⁶Ibid., 65.

Wise enjoyed some measure of success in recruiting throughout the Valley, but his flamboyant personality and domineering actions soon antagonized even those with Secessionist sympathies.²⁷ He renewed the persecution of Union sympathizers, sparing no effort to apprehend and arrest persons who had been connected with the movement which had established the Restored Government.²⁸ Wise believed these men to be guilty of treason for breaking with the State government. He alienated both the Unionist element and those who, while loyal to the Confederacy, were hostile toward Wise himself because of his demagogical nature.²⁹ He resented the unconcealed Unionist sentiment and openly denounced the "traitors" in his speeches and proclamations. In an official report to General Lee, he said:

. . . We are treading on snakes while aiming at the enemy. The grass of the soil we are defending is full of the copperhead traitors . . . We are surrounded with extraordinary difficulty of defense. A spy on every hilltop, at every cabin, and from Charleston to Point Pleasant they swarm.³⁰

By July 8, Wise had about 2,850 men in his brigade, including Colonel Tompkins' volunteer force which was

²⁷Moore, "West Virginia," 309.

²⁸O.R., Series I, Vol. II, 289.

²⁹Moore, "West Virginia," 309.

³⁰O.R., Series I, Vol. II, 291.

increased from 600 to about 1,800 men.³¹ Twelve companies of militia had been mustered into service in Nicholas, Fayette, Logan, Boone, Wyoming and Raleigh counties and placed under General Wise's command, some joining his main force and others being stationed at outposts in Summersville, Birch River, Gauley Bridge, and at points on the Elk River.³² Wise calculated this to be an effective force of about 3,600 men.

On the evening of July 8, another of Wise's task forces consisting of about 160 cavalry under Captain Robert A. Caskie, reached Glenville and was confronted by a battalion of the 17th Ohio Infantry.³³ After some skirmishing and a lot of shooting on the outskirts of town, the Union force drew into a line of battle at the courthouse. Caskie chose not to assault. Both sides exchanged fire all night without a single casualty, and when morning came, the Confederates returned to Charleston.

Wise made no attempt to establish more of a foothold in the lower Kanawha Valley. He located the Union forces on his northern flank and was aware of the Union camp to his direct front at Gallipolis, but he made no effort to occupy Point Pleasant at the mouth of the Kanawha River. Such a move would have strengthened his defensive position

³¹Ibid., Vol. V, 151.

³²Stutler, West Virginia, 65-66.

³³Ibid., 65.

and denied the Union forces use of the Kanawha River for transportation and logistics.

Instead, Wise constructed strong breastworks and entrenchments on Tyler Mountain about five miles west of Charleston. He fully expected the Federal attack to come from Gallipolis up the Valley and not from his northern flank.³⁴ Breastworks were also constructed on a hill overlooking Camp Two-Mile which commanded the junction of the Ripley road with the valley road leading to Charleston. Wise then dispersed his limited troops to establish far flung outposts and act as scouts. Tompkins also threw out wide picket lines from Camp Tompkins at the mouth of the Coal River about nine miles to Wise's front. The records do not show an overall defense plan utilizing Colonel Tompkins' command, rather it appears that Wise let Tompkins develop his own plan for the south side of the river. Wise's reluctance to integrate the State volunteers was demonstrated in a report to General Lee in which he stated, "The militia here are literally in the way of action. They require help from us."³⁵ As a result, Wise's defensive planning was fractionalized.

On July 3, General Cox received orders from General McClellan to move into the Kanawha Valley. He was told to assume command of the First and Second Kentucky Regiments

³⁴O.R., Series I, Vol. V, 151-165.

³⁵Ibid., Vol. II, 291.

and the 12th Ohio, to obtain a company of cavalry and six artillery pieces from Governor Dennison, and to move to Gallipolis. There Cox was to take command of the 21st Ohio Regiment and with his entire force, cross the Ohio River and occupy Point Pleasant. McClellan instructed him to advance up the Kanawha to meet the enemy and then entrench, remaining on the defensive and endeavoring to keep the Confederates near Charleston. McClellan's plan was to move south from Beverly after a defeat of General Garnett and cut off Wise's retreat from the Valley.³⁶ McClellan was apparently not familiar with the ruggedness of the terrain between Beverly and Lewisburg.

General Cox departed Camp Dennison on July 7 with seven companies of the 11th Ohio which had not been assigned to him. Since the Kentucky regiments were not fully equipped and ready for combat, Cox felt that he would need the additional strength.³⁷ Unfortunately, McClellan had planned to assign the 11th Ohio to another commander, so Cox got off to a bad start with his superior.

Cox had conceived a three-pronged invasion of the Kanawha Valley. Arriving at Gallipolis on the 9th of July, General Cox sent small detachments across the river as holding forces and scouts. As the other regiments arrived, they were sent across the Ohio. The 12th and 21st

³⁶Ibid., 197.

³⁷Ibid., Vol. LI, Part I, 416-417.

Ohio led the advance up the Kanawha on the 11th of July, while the 1st Kentucky was taken by steamer to Guyandotte and the 2d Kentucky was sent to Ripley. The 12th and 21st Ohio advanced by steamer up the Kanawha River with scouting parties on either shore, while the 1st Kentucky moved cross-country along the road from Guyandotte to Red House Shoal on the Kanawha and the 2d Kentucky marched on a road parallel to the Kanawha from Ripley to Sissonville, near the Elk River. The 11th Ohio remained at Point Pleasant as a reserve.³⁸

Cox arrived at Thirteen-Mile Creek on July 13 with the 12th and 21st Ohio and held his advance for news of the 1st and 2d Kentucky.³⁹ Information about Wise's force was readily supplied by the people of the region. One such informant was an itinerant Englishman who had taken a room in the hotel in Charleston where Wise was quartered. Through conversation with the General, the man had gained fairly accurate information on the size of Wise's force and even the names of some of the companies. The gentleman supplied this information to General Cox on his way to Point Pleasant.⁴⁰

The Union force under Cox reached the mouth of the Pocataligo River on the north bank of the Kanawha by the

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid., 419.

⁴⁰Boehm, "Civil War," 116.

evening of July 15. Here they were joined by half of the 1st Kentucky, while the remaining companies continued up the valley road toward Sissonville. Cox reported to McClellan that progress had been slow in the face of constant skirmishing since he had departed Thirteen-Mile Creek.⁴¹ Colonel Tompkins had sent out detachments to harass and snipe at the steamboats carrying troops and to interdict the wagon trains. Without artillery the Kanawha volunteers were able to do little more than slow the advance. No casualties were reported.

Meanwhile, the 2d Kentucky enroute from Guyandotte clashed with two Confederate companies out of Camp Tompkins at Barboursville on the 14th of July.⁴² The skirmish was short as the much larger, better-equipped Union force drove the Southerners from the field. The casualties were light: one Confederate killed, five Union soldiers killed and eighteen wounded.⁴³ Taking time to pull down the Confederate flag over the courthouse, the 2d Kentucky continued their march to the Kanawha where they ferried across to Raymond City and waited for the arrival of the main contingent under Cox. McClellan quickly

⁴¹O.R., Series I, Vol. LI, 420.

⁴²Stutler, West Virginia, 67.

⁴³Ibid., 68.

reported a Union victory at Barboursville to the War Department.⁴⁴

On July 16, another brief skirmish occurred when Cox's advance party encountered one of Wise's detachments near the mouth of the Pocataligo River. Wise's aide, Colonel Clarkson, and two troops of cavalry engaged about two companies of Union infantry, driving them back to the entrenchments of Cox's main body.⁴⁵ That evening Wise received a letter from General Lee dated July 11 which outlined General Garnett's situation in the north and which suggested Wise's movement to Bulltown to threaten Weston and divide McClellan's force.⁴⁶ Wise replied on July 17, greatly exaggerating the success of his initial contact with Cox's troops and ignoring Lee's advice.⁴⁷ He considered his operation central to the campaign in western Virginia. He said, "Give us arms and ammunition speedily and I will drive them into the Ohio River and across, and then turn on Master McClellan with the co-operation of Generals Garnett and Floyd."⁴⁸ Word had

⁴⁴O.R., Series I, Vol. II, 288.

⁴⁵Ibid., 290-291.

⁴⁶Ibid., 243-244.

⁴⁷Ibid., 291 and Stutler, West Virginia, 68. Wise claimed eight killed with the loss of only one horse, whereas the Union commander reported that the only casualty in the action was the horse.

⁴⁸O.R., Series I, Vol. II, 291.

not reached Wise of the death of General Garnett, killed in the battle of Corrick's Ford on July 13.

Apparently, Wise did not perceive any immediate danger, and certainly did not recognize the weakness of his divided forces. On July 17, Wise reported to Lee that he had 900 men at Coal under Colonel Tompkins, 1,600 men at Elk and Two-Mile of which he considered only 800 effective, and 1,000 posted between Gauley Bridge, Summersville, and the Old Mill on the Birch River. He overestimated Cox's force at 6,000 and outlined a plan for holding the entire valley by stationing large outposts at various points. Requiring a total of 7,000 to 10,000 troops for this grandiose scheme, Wise suggested that Generals Garnett and Floyd reinforce him.⁴⁹

General Wise had chosen a tenable location at Tyler Mountain to make a stand, but instead of using his cavalry to conduct proper reconnaissance, he severely limited his capability to repulse Cox by dividing his force and occupying large outposts. The number of lateral roads west of Charleston made Wise's plan of defense impossible, while he desperately needed to hold Charleston to ensure the subsistence of his troops. Wise posted more than a third of his force to his rear, supposedly to ensure that his route of withdrawal, the James River Turnpike, remained open. Because of the terrain and presence of few lateral

⁴⁹Ibid., 290.

roads east of Charleston, the Turnpike could have been held in many places by relatively small bodies of men. Forced to withdraw from Charleston, however, subsistence of his entire force in this mountainous, sparsely populated region was impossible and would necessitate a retreat all the way to Lewisburg.

General Cox considered Gauley Bridge to be the key to the Kanawha region.⁵⁰ He felt that a strong defensive position there would enable his forces to be resupplied by river transportation and allow communications to be maintained via the Suttonsville road with Union forces at Weston. Cox knew that Gauley Bridge was nearly one hundred miles from the passes leading into eastern Virginia. He calculated that wagon trains could carry no more than the food for the mule teams on the double trip, going and returning from Gauley Bridge to the narrows of the New River, where the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad crossed the stream.⁵¹ Therefore, it would be difficult for Confederate forces to attack Gauley Bridge once Union forces had seized and fortified it. Conversely, it meant that McClellan's grand scheme for the invasion of eastern Virginia by the James River and Kanawha Turnpike was visionary and impractical.⁵²

⁵⁰Cox, Reminiscences, Vol. I, 80.

⁵¹Ibid., 81-82.

⁵²Boehm, "Civil War," 106.

General Cox had narrowed the distance between his and Wise's force to only a few miles. He had the better part of five regiments consolidated behind the Pocataligo River, while Wise's strength was approximately 2,500 in the vicinity of Charleston but dangerously split between Tyler Mountain, Camp Two-Mile, Elk and Camp Tompkins. The Kanawha River and a distance of ten miles separated Tompkins from Wise. Part of the 2d Kentucky Regiment had reached Sissonville on the 16th of July and was now in position to threaten Wise's base camp at Two-Mile.⁵³ McClellan's success against Garnett in the north and Wise's divided defense was an open invitation for General Cox to attack. The Union commander reported this intention to General McClellan on July 16.⁵⁴

The first clash of any consequence came at the mouth of Scary Creek, west of Camp Tompkins on July 17. On the evening of the 16th General Cox ferried the 12th Ohio, two companies of the 21st Ohio, a troop of cavalry, and a section of artillery to the south side of the Kanawha River from Raymond City.⁵⁵ This force of about 1200 men under Colonel John W. Lowe advanced to Scary Creek and set out picket lines. Colonel Patton learned of the movement and with several companies of the Kanawha volunteers and two

⁵³O.R., Series I, Vol. II, 290.

⁵⁴Ibid., Vol. LI, Part I, 420-421.

⁵⁵Stutler, West Virginia, 70.

companies of the Wise Legion under Colonel Frank Anderson took up positions on the eastern side of Scary Creek (see sketch at Figure 5).⁵⁶

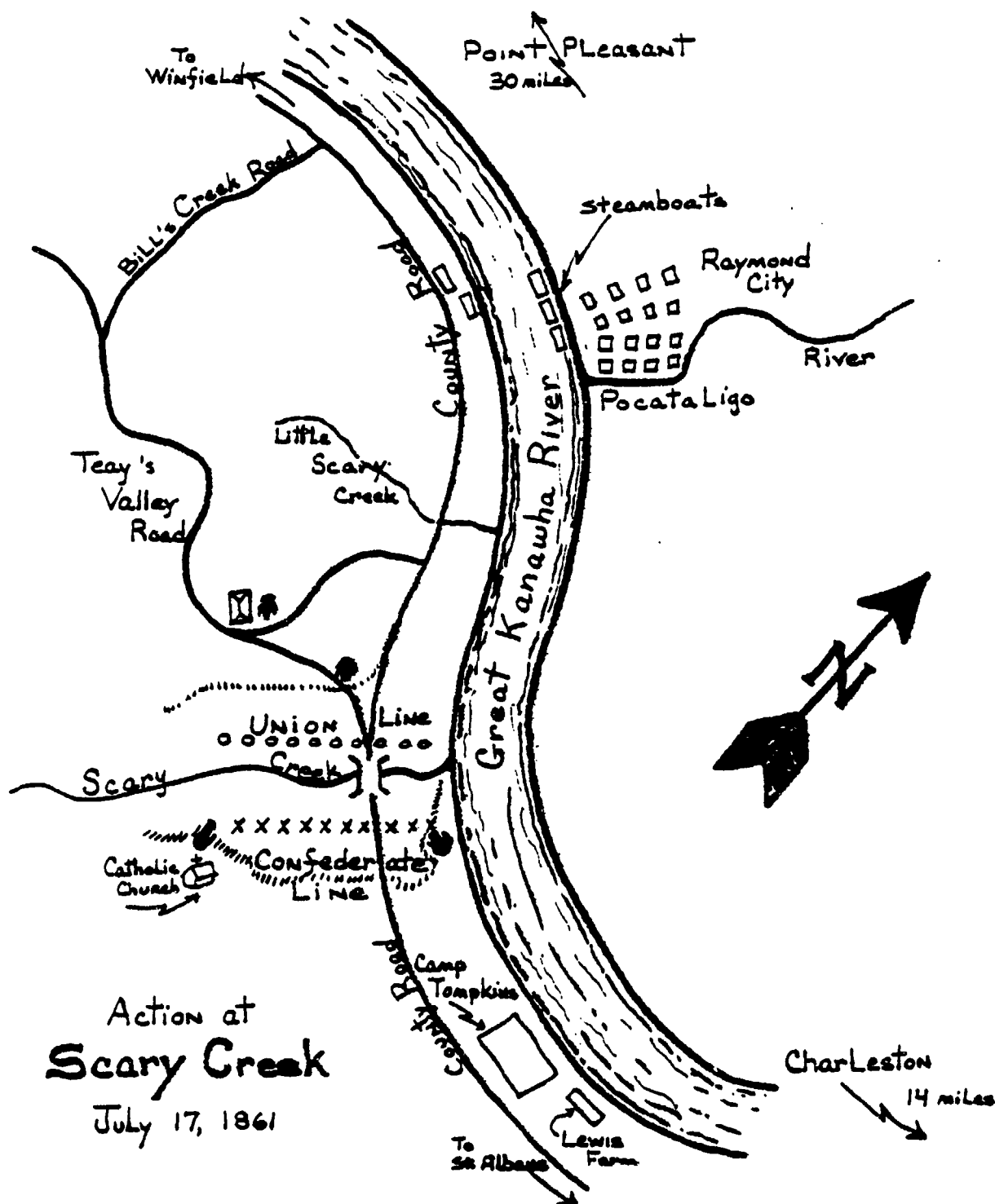
Although the Confederates had the smaller force at 800 men, they had the advantage of location on the east side of a deep, wooded ravine where the stream was not fordable. The west side was for the most part an open field and every movement of the Federal troops was exposed to Confederate observation. The only bridge across the creek and ravine was covered with Confederate artillery and entrenched infantry. About 4 P.M. the battle commenced and for half an hour the two forces fired steadily without great effect, except for the disabling of one Confederate gun. Then the green Southern forces were seized with panic and began to flee. Colonel Patton dashed forward on horseback, rallied them, and they returned to action.⁵⁷ Unable to launch a successful attack across the narrow bridge, Colonel Lowe and part of the 12th Ohio attempted a flanking movement some distance upstream where a fording was possible. Before they could fall on the Confederate flank, the main Union force had begun to retreat, their ammunition exhausted.⁵⁸ Colonel

⁵⁶O.R., Series I, Vol. II, 291.

⁵⁷Ibid., 292.

⁵⁸Boehm, "Civil War", 118, as taken from Charles Whittlesey, War Memoranda, Cheat River to the Tennessee (-----: W. W. Williams, 1884), 18.

Figure 5
Action at Scary Creek



Anderson detected the Union flanking party and forced its retreat, while two companies that had been covering the Turnpike from atop Coal Mountain charged up to reinforce the Confederate lines. This turned the tide of battle. The Federal troops, thinking that reinforcements had arrived from Wise's camp at Two-Mile, broke and began a retreat to the ferry point.⁵⁹ Colonel Patton was wounded and removed from the battlefield, but Colonel Anderson took command, occupied both sides of the creek and claimed a victory. The Union force recrossed the Kanawha and rejoined Cox, who had planned to attack Wise if the movement at Scary Creek was successful.⁶⁰

Federal losses were fourteen killed, thirty wounded and twenty-one missing, while the Confederates lost only three killed and three wounded.⁶¹ The affair received a great deal more notoriety than usual because of the capture of two Union Colonels and one Lieutenant Colonel. Not content to stay on the north bank, these officers found a boat and crossed the Kanawha to see the battle more closely. By mistake they landed behind the Confederate position and were captured. They were sent to the prisoner of war camp at Richmond.

⁵⁹Stutler, West Virginia, 72.

⁶⁰Ibid., 70.

⁶¹Ibid., 73.

Wise reported a "glorious . . . victory" to General Lee praising the bravery of his command.⁶² McClellan, on the other hand, was disgusted with the affair. From his temporary headquarters at Beverly, he sent a dispatch to the War Department calling for some "general officers who understand their profession."⁶³ In the same dispatch he announced his intention to move as soon as possible to cut Wise's rear, having already ordered Cox to remain in place.

Actually, Cox had not done that badly thus far in the campaign. In less than a week he had moved five regiments with supplies and had secured one-third of the Valley. He had accomplished the mission which McClellan had given him. His army was bloodied, but it was far from crippled.

General Cox proceeded to entrench along the west side of the Pocataligo River, while General Wise probed the position with cavalry and infantry. Deciding that his adversary was in too strong a position to attack, Wise asked General Lee for some 12-pounder howitzers and wrote the Confederate War Department for reinforcements, arms, and ammunition.⁶⁴ The records indicate a certain reluctance on the part of Wise to initiate offensive action.

⁶²O.R., Series I, Vol. II, 292.

⁶³Ibid., 288.

⁶⁴Ibid., 290, 292.

The success at Scary Creek might well have been followed by an aggressive repulse of Cox.

The situation appeared to be much as it had been before the action at Scary Creek. Between the 18th and 24th of July, Wise and Cox remained entrenched in their respective defenseworks. Wise's forces were still divided; 1,000 each at Gauley and Coal, 2,000 in the vicinity of Elk and Two-Mile, and the remainder at Tyler Mountain.⁶⁵ In a report to Richmond on July 19, he complained that, "If I go towards Point Pleasant they rush on Coal, on Two-Mile, and the Elk and Gauley, and if I move out of the Valley in any direction with anything like an effective force, they rush in and take the Valley, and if I stand still they move from all sides and shut me in."⁶⁶

Sometime before the 24th of July, Wise received a dispatch from Richmond dated July 17 informing him of the retreat of Garnett's command to Monterey and of McClellan's advance to the vicinity of Huttonsville.⁶⁷ It was suggested that Wise move up the Valley toward Covington and communicate with General Floyd who had been ordered to proceed in that direction. Wise considered the

⁶⁵Ibid., 1011.

⁶⁶Ibid., 289.

⁶⁷Ibid., 981.

"order" discretionary and decided to await "events and further orders" before proceeding.⁶⁸

Lee had placed Brigadier General W. W. Loring in command of the Army of Northwestern Virginia on the 20th of July and instructed him to defend the Virginia Central Railroad by preventing a Union advance across the Allegheny Mountains.⁶⁹ Loring was informed that Wise and Floyd had been directed to Covington to defend the mountain passes there. On the 24th of July, General Wise finally received Lee's communication explaining the necessity for a concentration of forces and instructing Wise to look to the security of his rear, since the road through Greenbrier Valley to Lewisburg was now open to McClellan.⁷⁰

Meanwhile, General McClellan had wired Cox that he would do what Cox seemingly could not do by moving personally into the Kanawha Valley behind Wise's forces.⁷¹ Before he could carry out such plans, McClellan was ordered to Washington on July 22 to assume command of the Division of the Potomac, leaving General Rosecrans in charge.⁷²

⁶⁸Ibid., Vol. V, 151.

⁶⁹Ibid., Vol. II, 986.

⁷⁰Ibid., 996.

⁷¹Ibid., 288.

⁷²Ibid., Vol. LI, Part I, 428.

Cox assumed the initiative and advanced to attack Wise's position at Tyler Mountain on July 24. He had delayed this movement for several days while waiting for additional wagons from Gallipolis.⁷³ Cox sent his troops in a circuitous route through the hills to outflank the Confederate position. They arrived late in the afternoon and drove in the Confederate pickets. The reports are conflicting about whether Wise had already begun his retreat or whether the Confederates were surprised at their supper meal and decamped in a panic.⁷⁴ In any case, they both agree that Tyler Mountain was occupied by an Ohio regiment without firing a shot minutes after Wise's departure. The Union forces nearly succeeded in cutting off Colonel Tompkins' retreat from Coal, while Wise fell back to Charleston.

The following morning the Northern forces advanced on the city. Wise ordered the destruction of the bridge across the Elk River, but did not attempt to defend Charleston as his forces retreated up both sides of the Kanawha River.⁷⁵ The Union troops quickly found some

⁷³Battles and Leaders, Vol. I, 139, from Jacob D. Cox, "McClellan in West Virginia".

⁷⁴O.R., Series I, Vol. II, 1011, and Battles and Leaders, Vol. I, 139-140.

⁷⁵Ibid.

river barges, made a pontoon bridge, and occupied the town by noon on the 25th of July.⁷⁶

Wise reached Gauley River by the 27th and after the last units had crossed the bridge, it was set on fire and completely destroyed. Without transportation the march was made on foot by all except the mounted troops, each man carrying his arms and personal equipment, if he had any. By the end of July, Wise had covered seventy miles in frantic retreat to Lewisburg, believing that Cox was close behind and that McClellan was advancing to cut his escape route.⁷⁷ Lacking supplies of all kinds, the army necessarily had to live off the country through which it passed, each man foraging to find his own food. Wise reported that nearly five hundred State volunteers deserted along the route as they passed the homes they had enlisted to defend.⁷⁸ He later modified that report stating that furloughs had been granted by unit commanders without his knowledge. It was a bitter week and the soldiers were in a demoralized and footsore condition when the retreat was finally halted at Bunker's Mill, four miles west of Lewisburg, on July 31.

⁷⁶Boehm, "Civil War", 121, as taken from Whittlesey, War Memoranda, 24.

⁷⁷Battles and Leaders, Vol. I, 140 and O.R., Series I, Vol. II, 1011.

⁷⁸O.R., Series I, Vol. II, 1011.

In his report to General Lee, Wise rationalized the failure of his mission:

The Kanawha Valley is wholly disaffected and traitorous. It was gone from Charleston down to Point Pleasant before I got there . . . The militia are nothing for warlike uses here. They are worthless who are true, and there is no telling who is true. You cannot persuade these people that Virginia can or ever will reconquer the northwest, and they are submitting, subdued, and debased. I have fallen back not a minute too soon.⁷⁹

General Cox had no intention of stopping at Charleston, as the key to the Kanawha Valley was farther upstream at Gauley Bridge. He established his headquarters in Charleston, left one regiment as a guard, and with the remainder of his force pushed rapidly up the Valley. Before reaching the Gauley, however, Cox received orders from General Rosecrans to remain on the defensive at Charleston until he could bring a force southward to help clear the Kanawha region. General Cox felt that he was too near his goal to turn back, so he pushed on and reached Gauley Bridge on July 29. Because the three month enlistments of the 21st Ohio were about to expire, he wanted to gain the Gauley position before he had to send those troops back to Ohio.⁸⁰

Although Cox halted his advance at Gauley Bridge, Wise reported that the enemy was converging upon him from

⁷⁹O.R., Series I, Vol. II, 1012.

⁸⁰Battles and Leaders, Vol. I, 140.

Fayetteville, Gauley, and Summersville.⁸¹ He moved to While Sulpher Springs, ten miles east of Lewisburg, where he established camp on the 3d of August.⁸² Baggage and equipment had been worn out or lost in retreat, and the brigade was in dire need of a refit. Measles and typhoid had greatly reduced the effective strength of Wise's force. Wise thought that a breathing spell would give opportunity to refit and reorganize his troops, while he awaited the arrival of General Floyd.

General Wise had given up the Kanawha Valley without a major confrontation. In his official report, he blamed the wretched condition of his force for retirement without a battle.⁸³ In the same report he admitted that his forces were divided, apparently unaware that he had committed any tactical error. A united stand at Tyler Mountain would have given Wise a decided advantage over the attacking Union force. Colonel J. L. Davis had arrived on the 18th of July with 300 fresh troops, giving Wise a total of nearly 4,000 men.⁸⁴ General Cox would have required more than his estimated 4,500 troops in order to assault a well-entrenched force at Tyler Mountain. It is difficult to determine the accuracy of Wise's claim

⁸¹O.R., Series I, Vol. II, 1011.

⁸²Ibid., Vol. V, 768.

⁸³Ibid., 151-152 and Vol. II, 1011.

⁸⁴Ibid., Vol. II, 292.

that he was unsupplied and unarmed. Tents, blankets, clothing, and like supplies were scarce in the first months of the war; however, it is doubtful that the majority of Wise's force was without arms and ammunition. One must consider Wise's own statement that he had an effective force of about 3,600 men.⁸⁵

To argue that Wise was forced to abandon the Valley because of a possible movement by Federal forces to Lewisburg, can be countered by the argument that such a move would have overextended Union supply lines and required the subsistence of troops in the same impossible terrain over which Wise retreated. Besides, any movement down the Greenbrier Valley would have exposed the flank of Union forces to General Loring's Army of Northwestern Virginia stationed in the vicinity of Monterey. Had Wise communicated with General Floyd, as was suggested by the Confederate War Department, cooperation and coordination between the two could have assured the security of Wise's rear, prevented a premature withdrawal from Charleston, and precluded a return in August by both forces over that rugged terrain to the Gauley Bridge.

⁸⁵Ibid., Vol. V, 151.

CHAPTER IV

Wise and Floyd in the Kanawha Valley

By the end of July, 1861, General W. W. Loring had consolidated the Army of Northwestern Virginia in a line of defense along Greenbrier Mountain with his headquarters and supply base at Huntersville. Federal troops under General Joseph J. Reynolds were concentrated at points in the vicinity of Elkwater, Huttonsville, and Cheat Mountain Pass. Although Loring's command outnumbered Reynolds 11,000 to 9,000, the latter had a decided advantage in that his troops, situated within easy striking distance of each other, were, therefore, mutually supporting.¹ Loring had four brigades at Valley Mountain overlooking Elkwater and two brigades astride the Parkersburg-Staunton Turnpike fifteen miles farther north. A decisive victory over Federal forces at Bull Run (First Manassas) on July 21 had bolstered Southern spirit and General Robert E. Lee was determined to put Confederate forces in western Virginia on the offensive.

On August 3, General Lee arrived at Huntersville to assume field command of all the Confederate troops in

¹Stutler, West Virginia, 95.

western Virginia.² Lee's first task was to smooth Loring's 'ruffled feathers'. A seasoned veteran of many campaigns, Loring had seen far more field service than his superior and felt that he did not need Lee's supervision. We must pause at this point to illustrate that particular facet of Robert E. Lee's character which made him the great general that he was. Douglas S. Freeman, Lee's foremost biographer, said that in Lee's conciliation of General Loring, " . . . he chose the role of a diplomatist instead of that of an army commander and sought to abate Loring's jealousy by magnifying that officer's authority."³ General Lee deemed it far more important to secure Loring's cooperation than to indulge in petty quarrels over rank and prerogatives. In a later incident, Lee's talents were to be fully challenged in an attempt to conciliate Generals Wise and Floyd, two men who had been much more prominent in public life than Lee.

On August 3, Lee wrote to Wise and Floyd expressing his concern that an enemy advance to Lewisburg would threaten the Central Virginia and the Tennessee and Virginia Railroads.⁴ He directed Floyd to join Wise at White Sulphur Springs and, with their united forces, to

²O.R., Series I, Vol. V, 767-768.

³Douglas Southall Freeman, R. E. Lee (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), Vol. I, 552.

⁴O.R., Series I, Vol. V, 768; Vol. LI, Part 2, 211.

take up a strong position in front of Lewisburg to halt the Union advance. Lee's perception that General Cox was advancing came from Wise's erroneous report of August 1.⁵ Wise, rationalizing his retreat from Charleston to White Sulphur Springs, stated that the enemy had been strongly reinforced and was converging upon Lewisburg in three divisions from Fayetteville, Gauley, and Summersville. Wise had left Colonel J. L. Davis with 500 cavalry and infantry as a rear guard in the vicinity of Sewell Mountain. Wise misled General Lee when he reported, "They are scouting the enemy to their teeth." Actually, General Cox had remained at Gauley Bridge under orders from General Rosecrans to fortify his position.⁶

General Lee's letter to Wise was not explicit in regard to Floyd's seniority. Wise seized upon this opportunity to retain his independence from Floyd, and in his response to Lee on August 4, he suggested that Floyd be ordered to move toward Fayetteville while he [Wise] would take up a position at Meadow Bluff to " . . . effectually retard and check the enemy, and call on General Floyd when I cannot do so."⁷ Correcting his earlier report, Wise stated that he was reliably informed that the enemy had no

⁵Ibid., Vol. II, 1011.

⁶Battles and Leaders, Vol. I, 142. General Rosecrans was reorganizing his forces; the "three-months" regiments were sent home and replaced with new enlistments.

⁷O.R., Series I, Vol. V, 769-770.

orders to proceed farther than the Gauley River, as yet. He then reported that at least a week to ten days would be required to organize, refit, and refresh his troops.

Enroute from Wytheville to join Wise, Floyd received General Lee's letter while in camp in Allegheny County. He dispatched his cavalry to Lewisburg and proceeded immediately to White Sulphur Springs. Although his knowledge of events in the Kanawha Valley was incomplete, Floyd was convinced that Wise had been badly beaten and was demoralized. Acting on information gathered from the populace along his route of march, Floyd wrote to Jefferson Davis on August 4 reporting, "The general impression strongly entertained throughout the whole country is that the retreat of General Wise was in fact a flight from the face of the enemy . . ."⁸ He then boasted that he could instantly raise the whole power of the southwest and speedily drive the enemy across the Ohio. Such were the delusions of grandeur and bravado displayed by the political generals of the day.

Floyd arrived at White Sulphur Springs on August 6 and met with Wise in the latter's camp that evening. Floyd was intent on proceeding immediately to attack Cox at Gauley, but Wise dissented, suggesting that he first be allowed to refit his command.⁹ Both held memories of

⁸Ibid., Vol. LI, Part 2, 213.

⁹Ibid., Vol. V, 773.

old political differences and were determined to yield nothing to the other. Wise was lodged in his delusion that President Davis had vested him with an independent command and was resolved, at any cost, to retain that independence from General Floyd.¹⁰ Floyd was of the impression that Lee had issued orders subordinating Wise's command to his. He asked if Wise had received orders and the latter replied, "None specific."¹¹ The two parted without a final decision and General Floyd established camp near Lewisburg with approximately 1,200 men.¹² An additional regiment of his command, approximately 1,000 men under Colonel G. C. Wharton, was in Wytheville making final preparations for the field.¹³

The next morning, August 7, Wise wrote to Lee requesting, " . . . special orders, separating the command of General Floyd from mine." He asked that each be assigned respective fields of operation; Floyd to guard the Fayetteville and Beckley roads, and he [Wise] to guard the turnpike and Summersville roads. General Lee rejected Wise's appeal, reiterating the need for a concentration of

¹⁰Freeman, R. E. Lee, Vol. I, 581.

¹¹O.R., Series I, Vol. V, 773.

¹²Ibid., 152. Floyd's cavalry of approximately 300 joined Colonel Davis in the vicinity of Sewell Mountain.

¹³Ibid., Vol. LI, Part 2, 210, 221.

forces under one head. In his reply to Wise on August 8, Lee said:

" . . . as soon as your command can move forward, in the preparation for which I feel assured no time will be lost, you will join General Floyd and take that part in the campaign which may be assigned your brigade."¹⁴

Lee then directed Floyd to assume command of all the troops in the region unless he had orders to the contrary from Richmond.¹⁵ This included 1,500 Virginia militiamen in Monroe County under Brigadier General A. A. Chapman, who had special instructions from Lee to guard the approach to the Tennessee and Virginia Railroad.¹⁶ Wise replied to General Lee on August 11 that he would " . . . cheerfully and earnestly obey [Lee's] orders to unite with General Floyd's command."¹⁷ This did not necessarily mean that he would take orders from Floyd.

Having called for a complete report on the condition and strength of Wise's forces, General Floyd officially assumed command of the Army of the Kanawha on August 11 and appointed Colonel Henry Heth to inspect all troops commencing with the Wise Legion. The combined command numbered 5,500 effective soldiers armed with the older

¹⁴Ibid., 773, 774.

¹⁵Freeman, R. E. Lee, Vol. I, 581; O.R., Series I, Vol. LI, Part 2, 220.

¹⁶O.R., Series I, Vol. LI, Part 2, 220-221.

¹⁷Ibid., Vol. V, 779.

smoothbore, flintlock muskets.¹⁸ Wise had lost some 500 Kanawha volunteers when he left the Valley while another 300 men were hospitalized with measles and typhoid. With less than half of the required tentage, clothing, equipment and wagons on hand, Wise's quartermaster had been sent to Richmond to procure supplies. Lacking a portable forge, many of the horses, both cavalry and work, were without shoes. Floyd reported to General Lee, the Secretary of War, and President Davis that Wise's command was in a very disorganized condition, but that he [Floyd] would "remedy the evil" and move to attack Cox.¹⁹

While the Southern forces were preparing to renew the fight in the Kanawha region, General Cox was fortifying his position, building a supply depot at Gauley Bridge, and energetically reconnoitering the country to his front and on each flank. Cox overestimated the Confederate strength confronting him at 8,000 men, including General Chapman's militia at 2,000 men. To counter this force Cox had two regiments at Gauley Bridge, an advance guard of eight companies of infantry and cavalry in the vicinity of the Hawk's Nest, a regiment along the Kanawha River to protect his supply line, and some western Virginia recruits organizing at Point Pleasant. On the 13th of August, the 7th Ohio under Colonel E. B. Tyler was

¹⁸Ibid., 781, 774-775, 777-778.

¹⁹Ibid., Vol. LI, Part 2, 223-225.

ordered by General Rosecrans to Cross Lanes by General Rosecrans to protect Carnifex Ferry on the Gauley River about twenty miles north of the bridge. General Cox was authorized to incorporate Tyler's regiment if seriously threatened by Wise and Floyd.²⁰

The combined Confederate cavalry of about 800 men (only 300 of which were Floyd's) under Colonel Davis was forced to report its reconnaissance operations from Meadow Bluff to both Generals Wise and Floyd. Cox's level of activity and rumors of Tyler's movement into the Valley resulted in exaggerated reports that nearly doubled the actual strength of Union forces. Cox's increased scouting activity led Davis to report his apprehension of a Federal attack. On August 13, Floyd informed Wise that he was moving forward to Meadow Bluff in response to the reports from Davis and requested Wise to send whatever forces he could spare.²¹

This request was met with renewed protest by Wise that his troops were not ready, and that, by his intelligence, Davis' reports must have been exaggerated. A sharp controversy immediately ensued via a series of rapidly delivered dispatches between the two generals. Floyd issued instructions directly to the State volunteers under Colonel Tompkins to join him at Meadow Bluff, and Wise

²⁰Battles and Leaders, Vol. I, 143.

²¹Ibid.; O.R., Series I, Vol. V, 784, 782.

immediately protested to General Lee requesting that Floyd be ordered to stop interferring with his command. Lee sustained Wise and instructed Floyd to communicate through command channels, but gave Floyd the authority to detach troops "as the good of the service may demand." Finally, Floyd peremptorily ordered Wise on August 14 to march at once with all forces to join him at Meadow Bluff.²²

The dispute between Wise and Floyd was somewhat aggravated by a lack of firm guidance from General Lee on the strategy to be followed by the Army of the Kanawha in the southwest. Floyd was determined to move into the Kanawha Valley, dislodge Cox, and recapture all the ground lost by Wise. Wise strongly disapproved, contending that the strategy should be to draw the enemy into the rough, mountainous terrain east of the Gauley River. This, he urged, would require the Union forces to employ long wagon trains over rough mountain roads, which would be subject to constant harassment by Confederate raiding parties.²³ This plan was not only convenient to the refurbishing of Wise's command, but it also restrained Floyd and precluded his possible success from damaging Wise's reputation.

Corresponding openly with General Lee, both generals had made their strategies known. Lee commended Floyd for

²²O.R., Series I, Vol. V, 782-783, 784-786; Vol. LI, Part 2, 232.

²³Ibid. Vol. V, 776, 778; Vol. LI, Part 2, 225.

his prompt movement beyond Lewisburg to "drive back the invaders" while, at the same time, he concurred with Wise's plan of "stopping the advance of the enemy on the eastern verge of the Wilderness."²⁴ Knowingly, or unknowingly, Lee provided sustenance for Wise's rationale for denying Floyd.

Finally, on August 15, Wise departed White Sulphur Springs with 2,000 men and eight pieces of artillery leaving Colonel Tompkins in command to ready the State volunteers and the remainder of the Legion.²⁵ Wise arrived at Big Sewell Mountain on August 17 and occupied the encampment established by Floyd, who had continued his advance toward Carnifex Ferry that same day.

Until August 23 Floyd's actions amounted to little more than reconnaissances in force, tiring his men and horses, and constantly summoning Wise for a junction of their forces. The petty bickering continued as Wise unwillingly followed Floyd into the Valley, his men as dissatisfied as he.²⁶

Floyd met little resistance in his northwest march to the Gauley River from Sewell Mountain, while Wise skirmished lightly with Federal scouts in the vicinity of the

²⁴Ibid., Vol. V, 781; Vol. LI, Part 2, 232.

²⁵Ibid., Vol. V, 787-788.

²⁶Freeman, R. E. Lee, Vol. I, 583.

Hawk's Nest on August 20. Floyd arrived at Carnifex Ferry on the evening of August 22.²⁷

Floyd's advance prompted rumors of a Confederate movement on Charleston, and Colonel Tyler moved his regiment of about 700 men down the river toward General Cox's position at Gauley Bridge. Cox decided immediately that the rumor was false and ordered the 7th Ohio to return to its former position at Cross Lanes.²⁸ Floyd took advantage of the temporary absence of Tyler's force.

On the 23d of August, General Floyd raised a scuttled flatboat and crossed the Gauley River near Carnifex Ferry with 1,500 men, placing himself between Cox at Gauley Bridge and General Rosecrans to the north. He thought, by thus cutting the enemy's line of communication, that he would force Cox to retreat down the Kanawha Valley. Floyd reported his position to General Lee and the Secretary of War stating that his intention, when reinforced, was to attack Cox if he did not retreat, or to move north to assault Rosecrans' flank.²⁹ With great confidence Floyd stated that, if he could receive three good regiments in place of the Wise Legion, the entire valley could be speedily reoccupied and permanently held.

²⁷O.R., Series I, Vol. V, 800.

²⁸Ibid., Vol. LI, Part 1, 454.

²⁹Ibid., Vol. V, 802; Vol. LI, Part 2, 248.

Notifying Wise of his success in crossing the river and of locating the enemy at Cross Lanes, Floyd ordered him to send his strongest regiments to assist in an attack against Tyler's regiment. Wise was at Dogwood Gap, midway between Gauley Bridge and Carnifex Ferry, when he received the dispatch on August 25. One of Wise's cavalry units under Colonel Jenkins had been ambushed near the Hawk's Nest, and Wise alibied that the defeat had delayed the release of the regiments requested by Floyd. He expressed concern that Cox was preparing to advance. Floyd repeated the order, but Wise sent excuses and arguments in return and kept his troops tenaciously under his command. Meanwhile, he corresponded with General Lee, Jefferson Davis, and anyone else who might listen, asking for "independence of command away from the orders of Floyd."³⁰ Not only was Wise apprehensive about Floyd's aggressive strategy, but he probably sensed each successful advance by Floyd as debilitating to his own reputation.

General Floyd launched his attack at sunrise on the 26th of August. Although Colonel Tyler had knowledge of the presence of Confederate forces, the 7th Ohio was not prepared. The Union soldiers were routed from their breakfast meal suffering 15 killed, 50 wounded, and about 100 captured.³¹ The regiment dispersed and retreated in

³⁰Ibid., Vol. V, 804-806.

³¹Battles and Leaders, Vol. I, 143-144. Graphic portrayal of the Battle of Cross Lanes is not available.

several directions, the greater part going eighty miles to Charleston before stopping. When told of the first victory of General Floyd's career, Wise sarcastically referred to it as the "battle of the knives and forks."³² This success greatly bolstered Floyd's self-confidence at the expense of Wise's pride and led to new friction between the two commanders.

Floyd entrenched his position and built a footbridge to connect it with the eastern side of the Gauley River. He told Wise not to send the regiments requested, but to keep pressure on General Cox by holding his position aggressively at the mouth of the Gauley River.³³

General Cox received word of the defeat on the same day of the battle and wrote to General Rosecrans at once. Cox did not consider retreat. He had stockpiled eight days of supplies and had no fears that his Union troops could hold the fortified position at Gauley Bridge. He did warn Rosecrans, however, that the Confederates might move next toward Sutton in the north.³⁴

Rosecrans prepared immediately for a counter-movement. He considerably overestimated Floyd's force at from 5,000 to 10,000 men and, as a result, he organized a much larger force than necessary to deal with the

³²Stutler, West Virginia, 78.

³³O.R., Series I, Vol. LI, Part 2, 254.

³⁴Ibid., Part 1, 458-459.

Confederates. By early September fifty-five companies were assembled in the vicinity of Sutton.³⁵ Rosecrans deemed it militarily important to the safety of Cox to dislodge the Confederates and planned to move south at once to crush Floyd.

General Floyd was not expecting a rapid reaction to his incursion, much less an attack. On August 28, he wrote to Jefferson Davis boasting of the strength of his position, " . . . from which I think no force of the enemy can drive us."³⁶ It was an exceptionally strong natural position set on a series of cliffs backed against the Gauley River, and must have appeared almost impregnable to the inexperienced Confederate commander (see Figure 6).

In fact, however, Floyd was planning to move toward the Kanawha River to take advantage of Cox's isolation, but he had to have the additional strength of Wise's command. During the latter part of August and the first few days of September, Wise managed to experience small skirmishes with Federal outposts near the Gauley Bridge and the New River, and used this as an excuse to refuse Floyd's demands for support.³⁷

Collectively, Confederate troop strength in the region was sufficient to have conducted a successful

³⁵Ibid., Vol. V, 119.

³⁶Ibid., Vol. LI, Part 2, 257-258.

³⁷Ibid., Vol. V, 812-816; Vol. LI, Part 2, 261.

Figure 6

Carnifex Ferry Battlefield

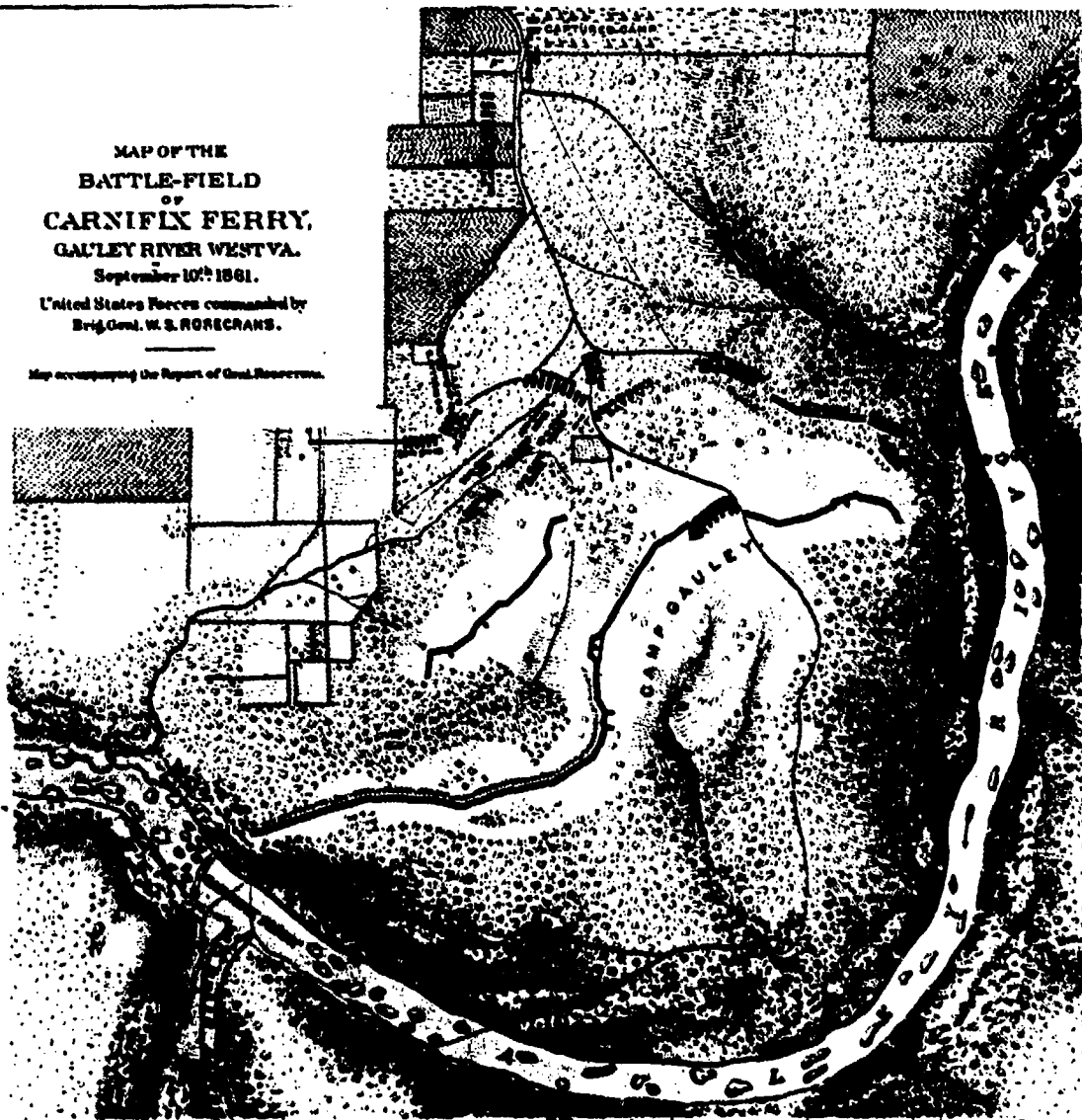
(The original spelling was Carnifix Ferry.)
Extracted from O.R., Atlas, Vol. I, Plate 9, No. 1.

MAP OF THE
BATTLE-FIELD
OF
CARNIFIX FERRY,
GAULEY RIVER WEST VA.

September 10th 1861.

United States Forces commanded by
Brig. Genl. W. S. ROBERTSON.

Map accompanying the Report of Genl. ROBERTSON.



offensive operation against General Cox had Floyd been able to secure the subordination and cooperation of Wise. In late August, two Confederate units arrived south of the New and Kanawha Rivers which brought the total strength of the Army of the Kanawha to nearly 8,000 men.³⁸ The first was Brigadier General Augustus A. Chapman's brigade of about 1,500 men which had moved up to Fayetteville from Monroe County, while the second unit consisted of approximately 2,000 militiamen who had been assembled in Fayette County during August by Brigadier General Alfred Beckley.³⁹ Subordinate to the commander of the Army of the Kanawha, these units' presence to the south threatened Cox's supply lines from Charleston. The Union commander was forced to employ a large part of his command in guarding the city of Charleston and the supply routes to Gauley Bridge. This reduced Cox's force at the bridge to less than three regiments. General Chapman's force posed something of a threat to Cox's main force when, on September 3, it occupied Cotton Hill, the mountain directly across the New River overlooking Gauley Bridge.⁴⁰ Chapman, however, was without artillery.

³⁸This figure of 8,000 included Colonel Tompkins' command of approximately 1,000 men, which was within two days march of the Gauley River on September 1.

³⁹O.R., Series I, Vol. LI, Part 2, 266.

⁴⁰Battles and Leaders, Vol. I, 143-144.

A movement by the united forces of Floyd and Wise down the western side of the Gauley River with Chapman and Beckley as blocking forces on the south and east would have forced Cox to retreat, or fight greatly outnumbered. Writing after the war, General Cox admitted that he was puzzled at Floyd's inaction at Carnifex Ferry in that he had expected a coordinated attack by the Confederate commander.⁴¹

Wise's refusal to cooperate with or be subordinated to Floyd precluded any possibility for a successful offensive operation. As a result, the opportunity was lost to strike a unified blow at Cox and force him back down the Kanawha River. The defeat of Cox and recovery of the Kanawha Valley, if only to Charleston, would have put pressure on Rosecrans from two sides and would have greatly improved General Lee's position in the north.

The feud between Wise and Floyd had become irreversible. Wise renewed his request for a separation from Floyd stating that, " . . . if we remain together, we will unite in more wars than one." General Lee tried to secure Wise's cooperation by appealing to his sense of devotion to the cause of the South. In his response to Wise dated September 9, Lee stated that he would not recommend a division of the Army of the Kanawha and begged Wise to act in concert with Floyd in accomplishment of the general

⁴¹Ibid., 145.

operations. In the same dispatch, however, Lee postulated the weakness of Floyd's position on the western side of the Gauley River, "exposed and inviting attack."⁴² Although this was probably designed to induce Wise to render assistance, it only served as sufficient condemnation of Floyd's tactics to be interpreted by Wise as the justification he sought for continued denial of Floyd.

Meanwhile, General Lee was in almost daily receipt of appeals from Floyd for reinforcements. Fully aware that Wise was as much as worthless to the commander of the Army of the Kanawha, Lee assigned the 30th Georgia and the 14th North Carolina Infantry Regiments to Floyd.⁴³ These regiments were several days' march away from being useful to General Floyd.

General Cox reconnoitered both Floyd's and Wise's position on September 6 and 7, passing fairly accurate reports on the Confederate strength and disposition to General Rosecrans. Floyd still occupied the fortified position on the cliffs along the Gauley River near Carnifex Ferry about ten miles south of Summersville. Wise remained near the Hawk's Nest, encamped on the high ground south of the Gauley River and overlooking the James River Turnpike. On September 8, Rosecrans informed Cox

⁴²O.R., Series I, Vol. V, 127, 842.

⁴³Ibid., Vol. LI, Part 2, 236.

that he was on the move toward Summersville from Sutton to strike Floyd.⁴⁴

General Rosecrans' force consisted of three brigades of infantry with compliments of cavalry and artillery. The First Brigade, commanded by Brigadier General Henry W. Benham, was comprised of the 10th, 12th and 13th Ohio Infantry. Colonel Robert L. McCook commanded the Second Brigade composed of the 9th, 28th and 47th Ohio Infantry, and Colonel E. P. Scammon commanded the Third Brigade made up of the 23d and 30th Ohio Infantry. In all, the Union force totaled approximately 5,000 men.⁴⁵ The column had moved out of Sutton on September 6, and by the evening of the 9th was encamped at a point about eight miles north of Summersville.

General Floyd's force at Carnifex Ferry (Camp Gauley) totaled less than 2,000 effective troops, but he had every advantage in terrain and in prepared fortifications.⁴⁶ Floyd's force consisted of the 22d Virginia Infantry (1st Kanawha), Colonel C. Q. Tompkins; 36th Virginia Infantry (2d Kanawha), Colonel John McCausland; 45th Virginia, Colonel Henry Heth; 50th Virginia, Colonel Alexander W. Reynolds; 51st Virginia, Colonel Gabriel C.

⁴⁴Ibid., Part 1, 474-475.

⁴⁵Stutler, West Virginia, 80.

⁴⁶O.R., Series I, Vol. V, 160. Floyd gave the figure of 1,800 men in his report on the action at Carnifex Ferry.

Wharton, and elements of the 51st Virginia Militia, Lieutenant Colonel W. W. Glass. He also had two companies of cavalry and two batteries of artillery (nine field pieces).⁴⁷ The Kanawha regiments under Tompkins and McCausland joined Floyd sometime after the 3d of September, having been detached earlier from Wise's command.

On September 9, Floyd informed Wise that three Federal brigades under General Rosecrans were marching upon him from the north. He ordered Wise to send two regiments to him immediately. Wise only countered with intelligence reports of his own, stating that his command would be endangered in the face of increasing enemy forces in his own area if he complied with the orders. Several heated dispatches were exchanged, and by midday on September 10, Wise was in receipt of a direct and specific order from Floyd for 1,000 infantry and a battery of artillery to be sent at once across the Gauley River. Wise reported immediately that an advance by the enemy was threatening his pickets at the Hawk's Nest, and that General Cox was making an obvious attempt to turn the flank and reach Floyd's position from the rear. Such an effort was not even contemplated by Cox, who remained at Gauley Bridge awaiting further word from Rosecrans. Using this as his excuse, however, Wise advanced to make contact

⁴⁷Stutler, West Virginia, 81.

and notified Floyd that " . . . under these circumstances I shall, upon my legitimate responsibility, exercise a sound discretion whether to obey your very peremptory orders of today, or not."⁴⁸

Rosecrans' troops arrived at Summersville on the morning of September 10, dislodging Colonel McCausland and the 36th Virginia stationed there as an advance guard. The latter fell back to Carnifex Ferry giving ample notice of the impending Federal attack. The column continued its advance with Benham's brigade in the lead.⁴⁹

The Battle of Carnifex Ferry began at about three o'clock in the afternoon of September 10 as Benham's brigade, drawn out in a line of battle, was halted by musket and artillery fire from the Confederate breastworks. Union artillery was brought forward and both the 10th and 12th Ohio attempted unsuccessfully to charge the fortifications. The Second and Third Brigades were moved forward as the battle developed in a rather piecemeal fashion. Dense underbrush prevented centralized control of the attack. General Rosecrans finally located himself on a hill where he could direct the action.⁵⁰

All three brigades were deployed along the full mile of Confederate defensive works, and assault after assault

⁴⁸O.R., Series I, Vol. V, 160, 838-839, 844-845; Vol. LI, Part 1, 476-477.

⁴⁹Battles and Leaders, Vol. I, 145.

⁵⁰O.R., Series I, Vol. V, 133.

was turned back with heavy casualties.⁵¹ Major Rutherford B. Hayes, a future President of the United States, participated in a direct frontal assault with his 23d Ohio on the right wing of the Confederate position. In his command on that day, in Company E, 23d Ohio, was a young private named William McKinley who also lived to become President.⁵²

The battle continued with the flow and ebb of the attacking forces as General Rosecrans sought a weakness in the breastworks. The 13th Ohio penetrated on the right, but could not maintain the position. With the coming of darkness at about seven o'clock, Rosecrans ordered his exhausted troops to fall back. They encamped about a mile to the front and set out picket lines up to the Confederate position. Only the strong defenseworks and a disorganized Federal attack with only four hours of daylight saved Floyd from being pushed into the river. Rosecrans' loss in the four-hour battle was 17 killed and 141 wounded, while Floyd reported none killed and only 20 wounded.⁵³

Rosecrans had intended to resume the attack at first light, but when morning came Floyd and his small army were gone. Without reinforcements, Floyd realized that defense

⁵¹Ibid., 133-146.

⁵²Stutler, West Virginia, 82.

⁵³O.R., Series I, Vol. V, 133-146, 147.

against the superior Union force was impossible. Under the cover of night, the Confederate infantry crossed the Gauley River on a log pontoon bridge, while the artillery pieces were ferried across with two small flatboats. After the crossing had been made, the log bridge was destroyed and the boats sunk.

Floyd's withdrawal, or retreat, was a remarkable exploit. So silent was the movement that even the 30th Ohio, on picket duty immediately to the front, was not alerted.⁵⁴ Only some personal baggage and odds and ends of military equipment were left behind. The hospital was abandoned and the Federals recovered about twenty-five sick and wounded men of the 7th Ohio which had been taken at Cross Lanes on August 26.⁵⁵

Floyd continued his retrograde movement to the old camp at Dogwood Gap. He met Wise on the road and ordered him to fall back also. With Floyd now in retreat, Wise dissented and remained at the Hawk's Nest. The two regiments from North Carolina and Georgia had arrived on the 10th of September, and Wise claimed that he was enroute with all forces to reinforce Floyd when they met on the road.⁵⁶ Few words were exchanged between the two.

⁵⁴Ibid., 146-147.

⁵⁵Stutler, West Virginia, 83.

⁵⁶O.R., Series I, Vol. V, 161.

On September 12, General Floyd reported to the Confederate War Department that Wise had failed to support him. He also complained that the 14th North Carolina and the 30th Georgia Infantry had not been pressed forward to his relief. Floyd claimed a victory at Carnifex Ferry despite his withdrawal, and stated confidently that with these reinforcements he could have defeated the enemy and marched directly to the Kanawha Valley. With the report, Floyd attached copies of his orders to General Wise and copies of Wise's replies. He indicated that the reasons for his taking this course of action would be apparent to both the President and Secretary of War of the Confederate States.⁵⁷

General Cox first received word of the Carnifex Ferry engagement on September 12 and moved at once with two regiments to attack Wise, who retired as Cox advanced.⁵⁸ Rosecrans, however, halted Cox until a means of crossing the Gauley River could be created for his forces at Carnifex Ferry.

On the evening of September 12, General Floyd issued orders to fall back to Sewell Mountain where more defensible terrain was available. This time Wise followed, not wanting to be caught between Cox and Rosecrans. General Beckley was ordered to fall back from Fayette Court-House

⁵⁷Ibid., 146-147.

⁵⁸Battles and Leaders, Vol. I, 146.

to Raleigh County in the south, while General Chapman withdrew up the western bank of the New River.⁵⁹

On the 15th and 16th of September, Floyd entrenched his forces on the summit of Big Sewell Mountain, while Wise selected a strong natural position nearby on Little Sewell Mountain. The James River Turnpike passed through a gap in the ridgeline between the two positions and represented the only passage for a large force without detouring north. Wise's higher position had the additional advantage of being bordered by the Meadow River on the northeast.

General Floyd wrote to Jefferson Davis from Camp Sewell on September 15. Referring to his official report on Wise to the War Department, Floyd requested the President's immediate action. Floyd stated that the proper course would have been to have arrested Wise instantly and sent him to Richmond. Realizing the political implications such action might have had with Davis' new government in Richmond, Floyd recommended Wise's transfer from the line by simple order of the War Department.⁶⁰

With both Cox and Rosecrans advancing in strength, Floyd decided that his own position on Big Sewell Mountain was not tenable. On the night of September 16, he withdrew to Meadow Bluff about fourteen miles further east.

⁵⁹O.R., Series I, Vol. V, 162, 850; Vol. LI, Part 2, 298,300.

⁶⁰Ibid., 296-297.

The 14th North Carolina and 30th Georgia went with him. When Floyd issued the order for Wise to bring up the rear, the latter had already resolved to make a stand at Little Sewell and ignored Floyd's order.⁶¹ On September 18, Floyd inquired why his order to fall back had been carried out and Wise replied to the messenger, "Tell General Floyd I will do no such thing. I propose to stay here and fight until doomsday."⁶² Wise had appropriately named his position Camp Defiance, and was apparently determined to make the best of Floyd's retreat to repair his own reputation. That reputation, however, was beyond repair.

General Floyd's reports were not the only ones received in Richmond concerning Wise's activities and behavior. Citizens in the upper Kanawha Valley, concerned about their situation and the inimical relationship between the two Confederate commanders, drafted letters to the President of the Confederate States. One such letter, dated September 19 from Henry Mason Mathews of Greenbrier County, cited the unfriendly relations which existed between Wise and Floyd:

They are as inimical to each other as men can be, and from their course and actions I am fully satisfied that each of them would be highly gratified to see the other annihilated.

⁶¹Ibid., 853, 855, 860.

⁶²Walter H. Taylor, General Lee: His Campaigns in Virginia, 1861-1865 (New York: Braunworth and Company, 1906), 33.

I have spent a few days recently in their encampments, and learned that there is great dissatisfaction existing among the officers as well as the privates, and am of opinion that it would be much better for the service if they were both deposed, and some military general appointed in their stead to take command of both their divisions. This I am sure would be gratifying to the commandants of the different regiments, and would insure success to our cause, at least in this division of our Army. It would be just as easy to combine oil and water as to expect a union of action between these gentlemen.⁶³

Although the citizens of the region did not place the blame on either commander, they quite readily pointed out Floyd's victory at Cross Lanes on August 26 and his partial success at Carnifex Ferry.

As Cox and Rosecrans advanced with about 8,000 strong and in separate columns from Gauley Bridge and Carnifex Ferry on September 18 and 19, Floyd repeatedly issued orders for Wise to unite with him at Meadow Bluff. Wise refused, insisting that he held the stronger position. He stated that he could hold Little Sewell, repulse the enemy, and thus defend Floyd's rear. Wise had less than 2,000 men, many of whom were sick. As he released this dispatch on the 19th of September, the Union forces moved to within four miles of Sewell Mountain and temporarily halted.⁶⁴

General Lee's arrival on the scene was, undoubtedly, the result of Floyd's official report to the Confederate

⁶³O.R., Series I, Vol. V, 864-865.

⁶⁴Ibid., 859-860, 862, 863, 868-869.

War Department and letter to Jefferson Davis concerning Wise's insubordination. Lee arrived at Meadow Bluff on September 21 and sent a message to Wise at Little Sewell, tactfully inquiring why he was not united with General Floyd. Wise answered that he considered his force " . . . united with that of General Floyd as much as ever has been, and in a way the most effectual for cooperation."⁶⁵ Seeing that no compromise was to be had with Wise, General Lee visited the camp on September 22 and found disorganization and demoralization widespread.⁶⁶

The situation was quite aptly described by Douglas Southall Freeman, writing from Robert E. Lee's personal memoirs. "General Wise stood defiantly amid his military chaos prepared to make Sewell Mountain a second Thermopylae regardless of military doctrine, regulations, or orders from superiors." All the reports Lee could collect indicated that Cox and Rosecrans were stationary to Wise's immediate front, having occupied Big Sewell Mountain since their last halt. Lee decided that the appropriate move was to bring Floyd forward and fight on the ground Wise had chosen.⁶⁷

General Lee faced a political, not a military, problem; Wise had staked his reputation on Little Sewell

⁶⁵O.R., Series I, Vol. V, 868, 146-148; Vol. LI, Part 2, 296-297.

⁶⁶Freeman, R. E. Lee, Vol. I, 591.

⁶⁷Ibid., 591-592.

Mountain and Floyd on Meadow Bluff. If Lee ordered Floyd to come to Wise, after Wise had refused the senior's order, it would be regarded by Floyd as a conspicuous rebuff. Both Wise and Floyd were politicians, had received political appointments to command, and wielded considerable influence within their political factions. Lee sought to conciliate their differences, rather than aggravate them, so he wrote as tactfully as possible to General Floyd explaining the enemy's disadvantage at having to fight at Sewell Mountain.⁶⁸ Though not an order, Lee's message indicated his desire for Floyd to move forward to Sewell Mountain.

While waiting to see if Floyd would acquiesce or be as stubborn as Wise had been, Lee's problem was solved for him. On September 25, Floyd forwarded a dispatch to Camp Defiance for General Lee which contained the following order from Richmond for General Wise:

War Department, C.S.A.
Richmond, Sept. 20, 1861

Brigadier General Henry A. Wise
Gauley River, via Lewisburg, Va.:

SIR: You are instructed to turn over all the troops heretofore immediately under your command to General Floyd, and report yourself in person to the Adjutant-General in this city with the least delay. In making the transfer

⁶⁸Ibid., 592.

to General Floyd you will include everything under your command.

By order of the President.

J. P. Benjamin
Acting Secretary of War⁶⁹

As clear as these orders were, it was only through Lee's advice and good tact that Wise was induced to comply. Wise considered defying the War Department as he had defied Floyd. He told Lee's aide, Colonel Taylor, that he " . . . left the field and repaired to Richmond in deference to [Lee's] judgment and counsel, rather than in compliance with the orders from the Department."⁷⁰

In Richmond, Wise was presented with a copy of Floyd's report. On October 28, 1861, after convalescing from an attack of pleurisy, Wise filed a lengthy report with the Secretary of War, Judah P. Benjamin, on the operations of his command from early June to his recall in September. The main theme stressed Floyd's tactical inability. The report clearly demonstrated great prejudice on the part of Wise, who believed that his command was unsafe under Floyd's control. Wise concluded his report with characteristic bitterness toward Floyd: "Whenever General Floyd shall think it proper to take any other or further notice of these [reports] I will, if I think it proper, take further notice of him."⁷¹ Wise was granted

⁶⁹O.R., Series I, Vol. V, 148-149.

⁷⁰Ibid., 879; Taylor, General Lee, 34.

⁷¹O.R., Series I, Vol. V, 150-165.

a leave of absence to recuperate on his Rolliston estate in Norfolk.

That no official reprimand or action of any other kind was taken against Wise indicated that the ex-Governor still commanded considerable political influence in Richmond. Floyd's letter to President Davis on September 15 alluded to this pervasive influence, when simple relief of command was recommended in lieu of arrest and trial at Richmond. Floyd predicted that certain enemies of the newly-formed Davis Government would seize upon such an incident as the trial of Wise to direct sentiment and sympathy in shaping public opinion. In his letter, Floyd stated:

The course I have decided to pursue will, I think, result in an active and clamorous support of you and your measures by that gentleman and his friends, because his transfer from the line by a simple order will save him from the pains of being cashiered, which would be his inevitable fate if charges were preferred against him, and in that event his whole influence would be lent to any opposition, however unscrupulous.⁷²

Even General Floyd, whose animosity toward Wise must have been at the boiling point, realized that arrest and trial of the politician-general would have been counter-productive. Furthermore, the Confederate hierarchy was too absorbed in the war and in its own problems of administration to be bothered with insignificant affairs of

⁷²Ibid., Vol. LI, Part 2, 296-297.

individual disputes. Furthermore, the public trial of an ex-Governor in his own city would have been folly. Jefferson Davis and Judah P. Benjamin were quite likely satisfied to accept General Wise's report and allow the entire incident to be diminished with the passing of time.

In the Kanawha Valley, a major confrontation failed to materialize between the Union and Confederate forces at Sewell Mountain. Heavy rains, bad roads, and poor logistics forced General Rosecrans to order a withdrawal to the Gauley Bridge. General Floyd managed to reoccupy Cotton Hill as part of a new offensive against Cox and Rosecrans, however, General Lee informed him that Loring's forces in the north were leaving and that the rest of the Confederate troops north of the New River were being pulled back toward Lewisburg.⁷³ Floyd withdrew to Raleigh Court-House and military operations in the Kanawha Valley ceased for the winter of 1861.

⁷³Ibid., Vol. V, 901.

CONCLUSION

By December 1861, Union forces were solidly in control of western Virginia. General Rosecrans occupied most of present-day West Virginia with about 40,000 troops, while Confederate forces along the fringe were nowhere in sufficient strength to make immediate attempts to recover the lost ground. The capitulation of this strategically important section of Virginia positioned Union forces considerably nearer to the heart of the Confederacy. It was a significant Federal gain which ultimately shortened the war and spared much bloodshed on both sides.

The 1861 campaign in western Virginia was important for several reasons. First, Federal occupation of the region assured the North of control of the Ohio River and the western half of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. The lifeline to the West, these lines of communication facilitated east-west transportation of supplies, soldiers and equipment. This railroad was of particular strategic importance to the North in the stationing of forces. Since most of the fighting in the east took place in Northern Virginia and Maryland, the railroad enabled Union forces to concentrate more quickly in those regions. This mobility allowed the North to control a larger area with the same number of troops.

Secondly, the South was denied the opportunity to use western Virginia as a base of operations from which to invade Ohio, Pennsylvania, or the District of Columbia. Within this base of operations were the mineral resources, industrial complex, and manpower which could have assisted the South in sustaining the war effort, thus prolonging the conflict. Confederate occupation of western Virginia would have forced the Union high command to divert badly needed troops from the east to the defense of Ohio and Pennsylvania.

Third, the movement of the Restored Government of Virginia resulted in the formation of the present state of West Virginia because the Union forces succeeded in the occupation effort. The sentiment of the region was divided and could have gone either way depending upon which side occupied the territory first. As the Confederates were driven out, hundreds of militiamen deserted the Southern cause to fight no more, or, if they did, to fight for the Union.¹

Fourth, the loss of Virginia's western counties in the first few months of the war was a psychological 'first blow' to the Southern cause. The new Confederate government was trying to establish itself, and a victory in western Virginia would not only have unified Virginia, but would have also sustained the confidence and support of

¹Ambler, West Virginia, 343.

those Southerners who were wavering. Conversely, the Lincoln Government realized, as a result of the campaign, that the war was not going to be ended with three-month enlistments.

Fifth, Federal occupation of the Kanawha Valley posed a constant threat to the people of the Shenandoah Valley and to the Tennessee and Virginia Railroad, which connected Virginia with the cotton states of the lower South. This threat required the presence of Confederate troops at a time when they were desperately needed elsewhere.

Finally, Generals McClellan, Rosecrans, and Cox achieved considerable recognition for the successful conduct of operations in western Virginia, and all went on to higher positions and further fame as a result. Most notable was George B. McClellan who, in contrast to Northern defeats elsewhere, was the man of the hour. More publicized than brilliant as a commander, the press glorified the man and magnified his successes. The New York Herald of July 16, 1861 referred to him as the "Napoleon of the present war."² Actually, his subordinates were more responsible for the success in western Virginia, but McClellan glorified his own reports and, as a direct result, was called to Washington to assume command of McDowell's Army of the Potomac following its defeat at Bull Run.

²New York Herald, July 16, 1861, Col. 5.

In contrast to McClellan, Wise's reputation as a military commander suffered irreparable damage. General Wise was relieved of command because his personal conflict with General Floyd precluded a unity of Confederate forces in the Kanawha Valley. Floyd's success at Cross Lanes in August might have been exploited by the combined effort of all Confederate forces, which outnumbered Cox's small army two to one by the end of that month. The opportunity for a coordinated attack to drive Cox out of the Valley was lost because Wise refused to cooperate with Floyd in this or any other operation. General Wise was lodged in his determination to retain independence of command from his former political enemy, whatever the cost. This fiasco resulted in the retreat of all Confederate forces from the Kanawha Valley by November 1861.

Wise failed to display any great tactical or strategic planning ability, even when he had the opportunity to operate independently in June and July in the Kanawha. First, he alienated the population with his demagogical nature and distinct lack of tact. This hampered his ability to recruit sufficient forces to rally the people of the entire Valley. Second, he divided his forces in the defense of Tyler Mountain and Charleston and failed to integrate the militia in his defensive planning. When the one opportunity to exploit success was presented immediately after the battle at Scary Creek, Wise failed to follow through. After a week of stagnation, during which

time Cox had secured his logistics and scouted the poorly organized Confederate defense, Wise retreated, allowing Cox to occupy Charleston unopposed. Finally, Wise failed to appreciate the significance of the Gauley Bridge in General Cox's strategy. Instead of retreating the entire distance to White Sulphur Springs, Wise should have established a strong position at Cotton Mountain overlooking Gauley Bridge. From there he could have prevented Cox from occupying that strategically important point.

Southern criticism of this and other Confederate losses in the west, at Forts Donelson and Henry, marked the beginning of public censure toward the Davis Government at Richmond.³ Several Confederate generals emerged from these first few months of the Civil War with diminished reputations and doubt was cast upon the ability of the Confederate War Department to organize the war effort. General Lee suffered greatly in prestige for his failure to coordinate the operations of Generals Wise, Floyd, and Loring in western Virginia.⁴ Writing at the time, Edward A. Pollard in his First Year of the War declared:

The most remarkable circumstance of this campaign was, that it was conducted by a general who had never fought a battle, who had a pious horror of guerillas, and whose extreme tenderness of blood induced him to depend exclusively upon the resources of strategy to

³Pollard, Lost Cause, 212.

⁴Freeman, R.E. Lee, 602.

essay the achievement of victory without the cost of life.⁵

General Floyd, having gained a slight reputation for his limited success in the Kanawha Valley, abandoned Fort Donelson in Tennessee and was dismissed from the service.

In the shadow of a noteworthy political career, General Wise's reputation was greatly diminished by his actions in western Virginia. The personal conflict between Wise and Floyd demonstrated the danger of employing political soldiers, particularly when such men were, or had been, political enemies. Following a debacle in eastern North Carolina, which resulted in the surrender of Roanoke Island, Wise's public denunciations of those Confederate authorities responsible aroused President Davis' animosity. Wise remained a Brigadier General until the end of the war. He was transferred with his "Legion" from one Department of the war to another; serving with General P.G.T. Beauregard (who had also been ostracized by Davis) in South Carolina, in the trenches at Petersburg, in the defense of Richmond, and with General Lee in the action and surrender at Appomattox.

A colorful and fascinating Southern leader, Wise never attained prominence as a military commander. He was, however, involved in the conflict to the last. Steadfast in his belief in the Southern cause, Wise was better known for his cussing and for his denunciation of

⁵Ibid., 602-603.

the Confederate Executive and Congress, always winding up with a stream of fiery invective against the Yankees.

Toward the end of the war, while camped on the plantation of a prominent and influential citizen of Richmond, Wise's men were accused by the owner of making depredations upon his property. Wise threw the man out of his tent and cussed him until he had ridden out of sight. Shortly thereafter, Wise was visited by General Lee and counselled about his use of profanity and his treatment of civilian benefactors. Lee began with: "Wise, you know, as well as I do, what the army regulations say about profanity; but, as an old friend, let me ask you if that dreadful habit cannot be broken--and remind you that we have both already passed the meridian of life, etc." Seeing that he was in for a sermon, and one that he could not answer to, Wise replied:

General Lee, you certainly play Washington to perfection, and your whole life is a constant reproach to me. Now I am perfectly willing that Jackson and yourself shall do the praying for the whole Army of Northern Virginia; but, in Heaven's name, let me do the cussin' for one small brigade.⁶

Lee laughed and said, "Wise, you are incorrigible."

⁶Battles and Leaders, "Anecdotes of the Peninsular Campaign", Vol. II, 276-277.

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